OVER 360,000 WORDS OF ADVICE

THE NEWBIE'S GUIDE TO

PUBLISHING

J. A. KONRATH

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Edition: April 2010

Introduction

In 2004, my first novel, a thriller called WHISKEY SOUR, was published. Since then, I've had eight book contracts, sold close to a hundred short stories, and my work appears in over twenty different countries. As of this writing, I've self-published several ebooks on Kindle, and sold more than 25,000 copies in less than ten months. I've won some awards, taught writing and marketing courses, signed at more than 1200 bookstores, mailed out promotional letters to 7000 libraries, experimented with blog tours and social networks, and have basically done all that I can to succeed in the publishing world.

I also wrote down everything I've learned, in the hopes that my successes and failures will help shed some light on this very mysterious industry. These essays have appeared on my blog for five years, and there have been over five hundred of them.

I'm often told I should write a book about the publishing business. My reply is always the same. "I already have. Just visit my website and blog. There are about one hundred pages of tips about writing, marketing, and promotion."

I was way off. Including the comments on my blog (which are often more enlightening than the actual posts) I've amassed more than one thousand pages of tips. Over 360,000 words worth.

That's a lot of pages (over 1000) to surf if you're looking for a specific bit of information.

So I decided to actually put all of this info into e-book form, organized by subject. This was a Herculean task to do, and I have my friend Rob Siders (www.52novels.com) to thank for it. If you're working to format an ebook, he's the man to talk to.

You can print up the monster if you have 2 reams of paper (the pdf is available on my website, www.JAKonrath.com.) But the advantage to this e-book is that the links are interactive. Not only are the sections bookmarked so you can skip to where you want to go with a click, but you can also visit the actual posts on A Newbie's Guide To Publishing and read the comments. You can add your own comments too.

I haven't included every blog entry—some were redundant, and time has rendered a few of them irrelevant. But I have included all of the tips from my website, along with several articles I've written. There are some repetitions. There are also some contradictions. I've left these as-is because advice is often repetitive and I've given myself permission to change my mind as I learn more. I've found that most people would rather defend their beliefs to the death than entertain a new idea, and I try very hard to function on proof rather than belief, even if it means I sometimes have to admit being wrong.

Also, my good friend, NYT bestselling author Barry Eisler, was kind enough to write the foreword, and also cool enough to contribute four terrific essays to this collection. Barry has even more must-read stuff for writers on his homepage, www.BarryEisler.com. Not surprisingly, he also writes some of the best thrillers in the business. You'll learn a lot by checking out his website, and his novels.

A word of warning before you dig in to the Newbie's Guide: Everyone's publishing journey is unique. Some of these tips will work for you. Some won't. You have to decide for yourself which advice to take and which to reject. Do this by setting goals, experimenting with ways to reach them, and learning from your successes and failures. Never take anyone's advice as truth without trying it for yourself. But you should try it before you judge it.

This is a discouraging, difficult, and often illogical business. However, a dose of lateral thinking, a shot of common sense, and a little bit of inspiration can make it easier to palate.

There's a word for a writer who never gives up… published. And there's a word for a published writer who never gives up… successful. That writer can be you.

See you on the road.

Joe Konrath

Schaumburg, IL 3/31/2010

Foreword by Barry Eisler

Whenever I teach writing, I emphasize three points. Read like a writer. Focus not on getting published, but on the things that make getting published maximally likely. And read J.A. Konrath's blog, A Newbie's Guide to Publishing.

There's no one in the industry more knowledgeable than Joe about both the craft and business of writing. A Newbie's Guide is the result of years worth of thought, research, discussion, and, most of all, experience. Want to know how to develop compelling characters? Write crackling dialogue? Run the kind of guerilla marketing campaign publishers only dream of? Put together a cost-effective, kick-ass book tour? Want to maximize your chances of getting and staying published? Then you need to read Joe. This is a guy who never accepts the conventional wisdom, who never does anything just because that's the way it's always been done, who's totally unafraid to try new things, who's remarkably honest in reporting the results of his experiments, and who's obsessed with sharing for free his uniquely valuable insights. Yeah, you can get published without reading Joe. But you can drive a car with the parking brake on, too — it's just not the fastest way to get there.

Until now, if you hadn't been reading A Newbie's Guide every day, as I do, it was a daunting task to search it for what you were looking for. But now, Joe has compiled the whole thing – all 360,000 words of it — into a cross-referenced, searchable ebook. Read a little every day and catch up on Joe's insights and advice. Or search the specific topics that are most pressing for you. Or both. No matter how you use it, A Newbie's Guide will improve your game — and your odds.

And one more thing. For God's sake, buy this man a beer. The information in A Newbie's Guide is invaluable, and Joe profits from it only in karma. A beer could get you in on some of that karma, too.

Oh, and when you see him, give him a big, sloppy kiss, too. He likes that sort of thing. You can tell him I said so.

Okay, enough of the intro — you should be reading Joe, instead.

Barry Eisler is the internationally bestselling author of eight thrillers. The latest is INSIDE OUT. *You can visit him at* www.BarryEisler.com.

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Writing

Distractions

Being a writer these days is the career equivalent of ADD.

Years ago, in the days of typewriters (note to newbies: a typewriter was a device like a computer, but without a monitor, memory, or Minesweeper) writers could sit down at their desk and just write. Then, when they finished writing, they could write their next book.

These days, not so much. Temptations and other work-related activities abound for the writer. There are dozens of opportunities to slack-off without even getting out of your chair.

- Writing blogs
- Checking for replies on blogs
- Checking for replies to your replies on blogs
- Computer games
- Checking email
- MySpace
- Surfing the net
- Message boards
- Checking Amazon

And then there are the other requirements of the job:

- Booksignings
- Touring
- Interviews
- Conventions, conferences, and festivals
- Library and school talks
- Stock signings
- Newsletters
- Mailings
- Websites
- Blurbing

And, of course:

- Other job
- Family
- Recreation

After finishing my 500 bookstore tour on August 22, I've managed to write 25 blog entries, visit 104 additional bookstores (I'm up to 608), do 19 events, and 7 interviews.

Writing? Who has time for writing?

Even when I do manage to sit down to write, the siren song of the internet calls, begging me to stop mid-sentence and research something, or check the blogosphere for mentions of my name, or catch up on my email.

So, in order to meet my 4000 word a day quota, I've had to get tough.

First, I don't automatically say yes to every speaking invitation I receive.

Second, I only turn on the internet when I take my breaks, every 1000 words.

Third, I keep working until I get my quota, even if that means I don't sleep.

When you're a writer, it's easy to forget the writing part. What are some of the things you do to stay on task?

33 comments

Goals

Most people have goals, and writers are no exception.

Some writers aspire to find an agent, or land a book deal, or hit the NYT list, or win awards, or gain critical praise, or sell a gazillion copies, or several of the above.

Here's a goal that most writers forget:

Entertain your readers.

Strangely, that's the most important goal of all. If your work can give people pleasure, many of the other things mentioned above will fall into place.

I find it interesting that many writers seem disdainful of those who achieve the above goals. It's easy to pick apart the flaws of The DaVinci Code, or to criticize the last several of Patricia Cornwell's books. (Boy, is it easy.)

But the fact is, someone obviously enjoyed them, because they sold like crazy. Dan Brown and Patricia Cornwell are entertaining millions of readers.

So why the sour grapes?

I believe that every writer thinks that their way is the best way. I believe that every writer believes they have the answers, and the only reason they haven't reached their goals yet is because things have happened beyond their control. And I believe when writers see other writers becoming successful, winning awards, gaining fame, it pisses them off, because they feel they are better writers and more deserving.

Of course, this doesn't apply only to writers. This is human nature.

Instead of concentrating on all of that, writers need to focus on the one thing that they do have control over: Entertaining their readers.

Looking objectively at the situation, I'd have to say that Dan Brown entertains a lot more people than whoever won the Nobel, Booker, and Pulitzer combined. Perhaps Brown, with his cardboard stereotypical characters, contrived escapes, cliched structure, and formulaic endings, is who writers need to hold up as the ideal.

Because no matter what else you can say about Dan Brown's books, he's entertained a lot of people.

My advice: Be entertaining.

You might not win any awards. You might get crummy reviews. The literati will despise you, your peers will vilify you, and many folks will dedicate themselves to knocking you down.

But trust me —-an email from Jane Average in Oregon who named her cat after your main character means more than any of the above accolades I've mentioned. Because that is a goal you did reach. You entertained somebody.

Write the best book you possibly can, then dedicate yourself to getting people to read it.

And maybe, if you're lucky, you can be as despised as Dan Brown.

33 comments

The Harder They Come: Writing Woes

Those who follow this blog know that I've been slacking on entries lately, because I wrote two books back-to-back January-April.

The second book, (FUZZY NAVEL, Jack Daniels #5) kicked my ass. I've never agonized over a book like this before. I fretted about plot. I worried about construction. I second-guessed tone. And while I was never blocked, my daily output was much slower than average —about half of what I can usually do.

Part of the problem had to do with writing one book right after another book, without any brain break in between. It was harder than I thought. My hat is off to writers who can write THE END and then immediately start on the next book. I'm not sure I'd attempt it again.

Part of the problem also had to do with the structure of FUZZY —it takes place in real-time, over an eight hour period. There are two POVs in first-person present tense, and six other POVs in third-person present. The book is pretty much all action; there's a psycho in Jack's house, waiting for her to come home, and Jack is followed home by three snipers —so she can't stay in the house, and can't leave the house.

Part of the problem was length. This book is my shortest yet, and I thought I'd be told to pad it out and bump up the word count.

But the biggest part of the problem was believability. I kept questioning if it was realistic to have my characters under fire for so long but still able to make jokes. The book is action-packed, but it's also funny, and I was scared this would take the reader out of the story.

So, for the very first time in my writing life (FUZZY NAVEL is my 15th novel, counting those that never sold) I doubted my voice. I doubted it to the point where I was convinced the book wasn't working. I'd made a big mistake. I was going to have to start over from scratch, and jump through hoops to satisfy my agent and editor.

Which meant I spent more of my time second-guessing than writing. Which meant the book took twice as long to write, even though there was less actual writing and more staring at my last sentence and wondering if I should change it.

The ending was tough. Keeping in sync with the experimental tone of the rest of the book, I also wanted to have an experimental ending. Even though I knew what I wanted, I kept worrying about it.

I hemmed and hawed until I finally sequestered myself in a hotel for four days and finished the bastard. Then it went, fingers crossed, to my beta readers.

To my pleasant surprise, they all really liked it. Since my beta readers are comprised of several published thriller authors, this made me feel pretty good.

What made me feel even better was my agent and editor saying they loved the book. In fact, the editorial suggestions they each made took less than two hours total to do.

So now I'm left to puzzle over my doubt. Did doubt make me concentrate harder and turn in a better book? Could doubt indeed be a good thing?

My conclusion: Hell no.

Doubt is never a good thing. If I hadn't doubted myself, I still would have written the same book, only faster. Doubt didn't force me to make changes, or take the story in new directions. All it did was postpone me from doing what I should have done in the first place; write the story I wanted to write.

So are you paralyzed with fear that your latest opus sucks? Are you convinced you're a phony and a fraud and can't write for shit?

Repeat after me:

1. When in doubt, keep writing anyway.

2. Tell your internal editor to shut up until you reach the end.

3. You're often a poor judge of your own work. Let your readers tell you if you succeeded.

Writing should be fun. That's why we became writers, right? It isn't for the money, fame, or glory. It's because we love telling stories.

Don't let worry get in the way of that love.

27 comments

More Intimidation

Meanwhile on the World Wide Web...

A site was hosting a discussion concerning my blog entry from a few days ago, about the writing contest I'm judging. The comments basically said I was being too harsh, dismissing stories for typos or incorrect formatting or too many exclamation points, because if I looked past those, the story might have actually been good.

I agree. It might have been good. Even very good.

But "very good" doesn't win contests, and doesn't get published.

"Great" gets published. "Wonderful" gets published. "Mind Blowing" gets published.

I wasn't being paid to judge each story on its own merits, or to offer detailed critiques on how to make it better.

I was being paid to find winners.

It comes down to the writing. All of the points I'd mentioned were indicators that warned me the writing wouldn't be wonderful. And the indicators were always right.

Consider the agent, going through 300 manuscripts in the slush pile that have accumulated over the last month.

She's not looking to help writers. She's panning for gold. And to do that, you have to sift through dirt.

It might be some very good dirt she's dismissing. But it is still dirt.

Be the gold.

The best way to get published, or to win a contest, is to shine. Don't be mistaken for dirt. Don't do anything that lets them reject you —-because they're looking to reject you unless you can show them you're brilliant.

Here's an interesting fact. After slogging through the first thousand stories, I got irritated at several writers. Not at the inept ones —as I said, I could quickly decide if something was no longer worth reading. But I became angry at the ones that held my interest and made me finish them, even though they weren't winners.

Sometimes I knew the story wasn't good enough, but something about the piece made me read it to the end anyway.

Consider that for a moment. I know I need to pick a handful of winners out of a few thousand. I get paid the same amount, no matter how long it takes me. Logic says as soon as I can safely say, "This won't win," I should put the story aside.

But in a few dozen cases, I had to keep reading, just to see where the writer went with it. Even though I knew it wasn't going to win.

I'm sure it is the same with agents and editors. I'm sure they get sumbissions all the time that they know aren't right for them, but they finish reading them anyway.

That's tragedy. That's shooting the game-winning point at the buzzer and missing.

You need to be better than that.

I preach all the time about determination, and hard work, and luck.

And I'm right about all of that. But you still have to write a kick-ass story.

"Very good" stories are read by a few people. "Excellent" stories are published, and read by thousands.

34 comments

Plot Vs. Character

I'm an advocate of cutting everything non-essential to the story. It's *the Kill Your Darlings School of Writing*. If it ain't needed, trim it.

But does that include characterization? Aren't those little extra descriptions, those bits of nuance and idiosyncrasy, needed to establish a character?

To which I firmly answer: kind of.

I believe that characters are there to serve the plot, rather than the plot being a device to showcase characters. They overlap, but I'd bet a writer who spends two pages describing a character could boil down that character's essence to a few short sentences and not lose anything.

Characterization for the sheer sake of characterization is useless.

My heroine in Whiskey Sour, Jacqueline Daniels, has insomnia. This is specifically tied into her career, her perceived failure as a wife, and her opinion of herself. Though insomnia is a character trait of Jack's, and I spend a few pages describing it, it's still essential to the plot at several key points–it even saves her life once. If Jack didn't have insomnia, the book would be entirely different.

Let's say Jack also has migraines. This could also be a bit a characterization, and might also say something about her, the way she lives, and why she does the things she does. But unless I actually use those migraines to advance the plot (such as she suffers one in the middle of a shoot-out and can't function), having the audience know about them is unneeded.

During the book we find out about Jack's past —her childhood, her marriage, her career. I could have put in a flashback chapter about the night she found out her father died —all that was going through her childhood mind, all the emotions she was feeling, a blow-by-blow account of his death. This could have invoked reader sympathy and identification for Jack's character.

But I didn't do that. I described her Dad's death in one sentence. Why?

Because even though it added to Jack's character, it wasn't essential to the story.

So I killed Jack's dad, then let the reader figure out how it affected her.

Give the reader just enough to picture the scene. Too much and you bore the reader. Too little and —well, I'll be honest here; I've never seen a case where the author gave the reader too little. Pre-published writers usually spend more time on characters than plots, and it hurts them. We're not writing résumés. We're writing stories.

I think cutting everything about a character that doesn't relate to the plot is a smart idea, because it forces you to consider the character within the plot and giver her traits that NEED to exist. The trick here (and it is a trick) is to make each chapter, each paragraph, each word ESSENTIAL.

Every trait and description you give a character should be followed by asking yourself why that character needs that trait and description. Do you want to make the reader sympathize? Hate? Understand? Fear? Laugh? How can you do that succinctly?

All of this should be thought-out, the same way a plot should be thought-out.

Now there have been cases in my writing where I don't call my own pot black. Usually I transgress to put in a joke, or a funny situation. This could possibly fall under necessary characterization, because humor is essential to the success of the story. But it could just as easily be cut and not hurt the story at all.

This kind of indulgence only works on a line-by-line-basis. A quick joke here, and a quick pun there. I'd never include a three-page humorous anecdote, no matter how amusing, if it didn't advance the story. If I find I really want to include something that I know is purely fluff, I try to make it part of the plot.

Jack's partner, Herb Benedict, overeats. In Whiskey Sour, this is mostly comic relief. But in the sequel, Bloody Mary, Herb goes on a diet, which is a catalyst for several important changes that occur to his character.

I spared this particular darling and used it to advance the plot.

This doesn't mean you should strip your characters of all traits so they're wooden stereotypes. Well-drawn characters are important in fiction. If a reader doesn't care about the protagonist and antagonist, it doesn't matter how many rollercoaster twists the plot has. As writers, it's our duty to make our characters memorable.

But always remember; interesting characters are not interesting because of who they are. They are interesting because of what they do. Who they are may effect what they do, but backstory and exposition are poor ways to describe characters. Action and dialog are much better. And these actions and dialogs should be revealed through the plot.

You are writing a STORY, and not a CHARACTER. But I don't condone neglecting characterization in lieu of story.

In fact, done properly, the two aren't separate at all.

Outlines, Writer's Block, and Motivation

There are a few universal truths for writers.

1. There's always something else to do other than write.
2. Forcing yourself to write is easier said than done.
3. Writing is easier if you have a game plan.

Writers are motivated by different things, but motivation often isn't enough to get the words down on paper. Every writer struggles with the blank page, at some point in their life. Doubt creeps in, the words just don't come, there are other things that need to get done, the deadline is looming, the story doesn't work, so why bother.

If you never played the game of baseball before, and you were put onto the field without knowing what the heck you were doing, it doesn't matter how much determination or enthusiasm or talent you have; you won't do well.

It's the same thing with writing. Knowing what you're doing is just as important as doing in. And the easiest way to know what you're doing is to come up with a plan.

For novels, the plan I use is an outline.

When you have a multi-book deal, you'll need to turn in outlines. It's specified in your contract. Money is portioned out to you in lump sums. You get paid upon signing the contract, upon turning in an outline, and upon turning in the next book. And your editor must approve the outline before you begin working on the book.

This is only the case for Book #2 and beyond. Your first book doesn't require an outline. No one will ask for one —not editors, not agents.

But an outline is still a useful tool to help you finish Book #1. First of all, it helps you know where the story is going, so you don't run into dead ends or run out of steam. It can help you find the slow spots in your narrative, it's much easier to add scenes and characters to an outline than a novel-in-progress, and it helps you focus on the craft of the story, as opposed to the art of writing.

An outline is also extremely helpful when it comes to motivation. Once the story is down on paper (in outline form) all you need to do is add the bells and whistles; the action, dscription, and dialog. You don't need to worry about *what happens next* because you already know. That frees up your mind to create characters and settings and scenes without having to wonder if the book is working, or if there's enough conflict.

I've never really understood writer's block, because I've never had it. I know it is part psychological and part motivational, sort of like being on that baseball field, knowing you have to perform, but not knowing how to get the job done.

Here's the thing; if you already have a template, you don't need motivation, and you don't get blocked. It's like painting by numbers.

What is an outline does is offer you a template. You simply need to fill in the color.

My outlines are very detailed. They run between 30 and 40 pages. I go chapter by chapter, and list who is in each scene, what information needs to be revealed, and what the conflict is.

I write outlines in present tense, and give each chapter a paragraph or two. If you're interested, here's the outline for **BLOODY MARY** as a download.

Q: How long does it take to write an outline?

A: Outlines are hard. They require a lot of thought, because you're plotting the entire book —every scene, every twist, every dramatic moment. It usually takes me a solid week of 8 hour days to knock out a forty page outline. But once I do it, writing the book is easy, because I already got all of the hard stuff out of the way.

Q: Do you use action or dialog in the outline?

A: Sometimes. It's sort of like describing a movie to your friends. Sometimes you quote dialog. Sometimes you mime some action. But the thrust of it is *"What Happens Next?"*

Q: Do you ever deviate from the outline?

A: All the time. A book is organic, and can change dramatically. Don't be afraid of that. An outline is a basic frame, but it's pliable. It's much easier to take a book in a different direction if you know your ultimate destination, and an outline helps remind you of that. It also keeps you focused, and allows you to bang out a few pages of manuscript even when the muse isn't around.

Q: Will your editor get angry if the book changes from outline to finished novel, especially since she had to approve of the outline?

A: Not as long as you're keeping the essence of the material.

Q: How detailed do you have to get?

A: The more detailed the outline, the easier it is to write the book. Some authors turn in a ten page outline, which is fine. But they usually do more sweating when the deadline looms closer.

Q: Isn't it harder to write a good outline than it is to write a good book?

A: No. The outline doesn't have to be perfect. When you turn it in, you aren't expected to make your editor laugh, or move her to tears. You're just showing her blueprints of your boat, and she's just checking to make sure it will float when built.

Q: Are there any good books on outlining?

A: Probably. I've never looked. I think most writers know about dramatic structure. In my books, I try to keep raising the stakes, constantly introduce conflict (both internal and external) , and make sure the chapters end on a high note so the reader wants to keep reading. Each scene has to have a point, a reason for existing. It has to fufill some kind of purpose —reveal clues, enhance character, add suspense, raise tension, ratched up the conflict. If a scene does several of these things, it's a really good scene. This is much easier to spot in an outline than in a book.

Q: Should I outline?

A: If you ever sign a multi book deal, you'll be required to outline, so you might as well start now. But don't worry about turning in an outline for a first novel —-the agent and editor wants to see a finished book, not an outline.

33 comments

Avoiding Plodding Plotting

I did a speaking thing the other day, and afterward a bright and talented young author expressed that plotting was difficult for him.

I gave him my stock answer: torture your protagonist.

The fact is, readers don't want your hero to be happy. At least, not until the end. They want angst, conflict, ruined dreams, dashed hopes, impossible situations, neuroses, struggle, heartache, near death experiences, ruined lives, and pain.

All you need to know about plotting is twofold.

1. Give your characters goals.
2. Don't let them reach those goals.

For example, let's say we're writing a YA coming of age novel about a 14 year old video game geek named Leroy. His goals: kiss a girl, mend his parents' unstable marriage, and get ahold of Grand Theft Doom Craft 3: Halo and Goodbye and the new GameBox X-Station System. Let's also make his family very poor.

So how do we torture Leroy?

- His parents won't let him have the game, because it is too violent, and they can't afford it
- He asks the cutest girl in school to the dance, and she says yes, but he can't dance
- He bribes the high school bully to buy him the game and system, cashing in his bonds (which are supposed to be for college)

What happens next?

- His parents begin a trial separation
- The bully takes all of his money but doesn't buy him the game
- He needs dance lessons, but no longer has any money (the bully has it)

And then?

- His best friend gets the game, but won't let him play
- The cute girl cancels the date
- He tries to get him money back from the bully, and gets beaten up.

Now what?

- The cute girl is going with the bully to the dance

- Leroy confides in his Dad, who boxed Golden Gloves in high school, and he gives him some lessons
- Leroy confides in him Mom, who shows him how to dance

How can things get worse?

- Leroy sucks as a fighter
- Leroy sucks as a dancer
- Leroy sucks as a matchmaker
- Leroy overhears that the bully is going to go 'all the way' with the cute girl after the dance, whether she wants to or not
- GTDC3:H&G is having a high score contest, and the winner gets $10000 dollars

How will this end?

Come on. You know how it's going to end.

His friend lets him finally play the new game, and Leroy gets a great score and sends it to the contest folks. Then Leroy goes to the dance stag, walks in on the bully making unwanted advances on the cute girl, cleans his clock, dances with her, gets a kiss, goes home to find out Dad has moved back in.

And, of course, the prize people show up with a check for $10000.

Or maybe the parents don't get together, and Leroy doesn't win the money, but he realizes that growing up means you don't always get what you want.

The point is, if you keep thinking "How can I make this worse?" plotting takes care of itself.

If you've ever read a book with a surprise twist, it was probably the result of the author thinking, "What would no one expect could happen next?"

If we wanted to add a twist to the story, we could have the cute girl be a secret videogame addict, and she wins the contest and gives Leroy back the money he lost to the bully. Or the Dad, in a fit of overcompensation after leaving home, buys Leroy the game system. Or the bully turns out to be Leroy's brother, because Leroy's Dad is a cheater, which is why Mom kicked him out.

And if you're truly stuck, use my tried and true Jump Start the Plot Trick: "And when I answered the door... there were zombies!"

That always works.

36 comments

First Lines

First lines are the most important lines in the story. Here are some of mine from stories and books I've sold:

There were four black and whites already at the 7-Eleven when I arrived. — WHISKEY SOUR

"It would be so easy to kill you while you sleep." — BLOODY MARY

The sound begins. Again. — RUSTY NAIL

No security cameras this time, but he still has to be careful. —DIRTY MARTINI

"She sure bled a lot." — ON THE ROCKS

"His skull is shattered and his spinal column looks like a dutch pretzel." — WITH A TWIST

Mitch couldn't answer me with the barrel of my gun in his mouth, so I pulled it out. — STREET MUSIC

"I want you to kill the man that my husband hired to kill the man that I hired to kill my husband." — TAKEN TO THE CLEANERS

The woman twisting the tube into my penis has cold hands. — FORGIVENESS

"That's gotta be where the money is." — THE SHED

Hudson closed his eyes and swallowed hard, trying to stop sweating. — THE AGREEMENT

There's an art to getting your ass kicked. — EPITAPH

"I want you to kill my wife." — SUFFER

"Let me get this straight —you want me to murder you tonight?" — REDUX

"Eat it." — FINICKY EATER

The mark knelt next to a garbage can, two hands unsuccessfully trying to plug nine holes in his face, neck, and upper body. — LIGHT DRIZZLE

"No thanks." — THE BAG

Rust from the crowbar flaked off, coating my palm with orange dust. — BASKET CASE

Voice Module 195567 Record Mode: Is this thing working? — SYMBIOS

Some are stronger than others. Why? What makes a first line good or bad? Feel free to post some of your favorites.

40 comments

Tips For The First Chapter

1. Make sure the first chapter starts with action.

2. Show, don't tell. This means you don't need a one paragraph description of a bedroom, a character's thoughts on everything, and for god's sake don't put any backstory int he first chapter.

3. Keep it short. It doesn't have to be James Patterson short, but a ten page first chapter is better than a thirty page first chapter when it comes to grabbing attention.

4. Watch your POV... try to stick in one character's mind for the whole chapter.

5. Cut everything that doesn't move the action forward. EVERYTHING. If it moves the story forward, or gives us a better feel for the characters, put it in a later chapter, but not the first. Leave the reader wanting more, not knowing everything.

6. You probably don't need a prologue. Editors often cut them, and readers often skip them. Try to remove it and see if the story suffers. If you really believe you need one, don't make it longer than a few pages.

7. And this is the most important —-trust yourself. You've been writing since you were four. You know how to craft a sentence. Not eveything needs to be rewritten —-sometimes it comes out right the first time.

Salable Characters

Use these explanations and the following worksheet to create your story heroes, supporting charactyers, and villains.

UNIQUE- What makes this person different from anyone else? Why is this hero the ONLY ONE who could be in your story? Include profession, race, gender, age, and brief description.

GOALS- What are your protagonist's goals? Dreams? Fears? Things they desperately want?

FLAWS- What personal, internal problem will get in the way of the hero reaching his/her goals? Addiction? Illness? Disability? Neuroses?

QUIRKS- What are the strange, bizarre, personal, or human traits this hero possesses? Habits and rituals

PERSPECTIVE- First person or third person, and why?

SUPPORT- Who are the supporting, returning characters that assist your hero? Friends? Co-workers?

ENEMY- Your villain should have all of these traits as well. Who will make a worthy opponent for your hero?

EXAMPLE- LT. JACQUELINE "JACK" DANIELS, CHICAGO VIOLENT CRIMES

featured in the novels ***WHISKEY SOUR, BLOODY MARY & RUSTY NAIL,*** and the EQMM short stories ***ON THE ROCKS*** & ***WITH A TWIST*** by JA Konrath

UNIQUE- Jack is 46, divorced, unlucky in love but a good cop–she had to be to become a Lieutenant in the male-dominated fraternity of the CPD. Jack has dedicated her life to the Job, but is now at an age where she's regretting never starting a family.

GOALS- Jack needs to do well in her career; that's the only time she feels good about herself. But she also realizes, for the first time, that there's more to life than work, and she wants to broaden her personal life.

FLAWS- Jack has insomnia, due to her fixation with her job. She constantly questions her own actions, wondering if she could have done better. She doesn't think she's worthy of love.

QUIRKS- Her insomnia causes her to max out her credit cards watching the late night Home Shopping Network. She worries too much about fashion, and is envious of those who dress better than she does.

PERSPECTIVE- First person for Jack, third person for the villain.

SUPPORT- Overweight partner Det. Herb Benedict, accountant boyfriend Latham Conger, mother Mary Streng, ex-husband Alan Daniels, criminal friend Phineas Troutt, ex-partner PI Harry McGlade, hellspawn cat Mr. Friskers.

ENEMY- In WHISKEY SOUR, a serial killer called The Gingerbread Man is making snuff movies in his basement and wants to make one with Jack. In BLOODY MARY, a maniac is dismembering people and leaving accessories of Jack's at the crime scenes.

Creating Salable Characters Worksheet

Fill in the following information for the characters in your story

UNIQUE-

GOALS-

FLAWS-

QUIRKS-

PERSPECTIVE-

SUPPORT-

ENEMY-

Villainy

Let's talk about bad guys.

Some of my favorite books have villains that are just as memorable as the hero.

But what makes a good antagonist? Other than being in competition/conflict/opposition to the hero, what are the traits an adversary needs to have?

Here are a few things your villain should be:

- **Charismatic.** The reader should be attracted to the villain in some way, even if it is a car-wreck type of attraction.
- **Powerful.** The villain should be more powerful than the protagonist. Underdog stories are as old as the bible, and show no signs of losing public favor.
- **Motivated.** A villain should have goals, dreams, desires, and reasons for doing what they do.
- **Cruel.** Bad guys do bad things. That's what makes them bad.
- **Active.** Like heroes, villains shouldn't be passive. The need to be doing things, moving the plot along, rather than simply reacting to things.
- **Realistic.** If the reader doesn't believe the villain, the tension is gone.

Many crime novels don't have strong villains. Either the bad guy isn't revealed until the end, or the story dwells more on the protagonist's journey.

This is a missed opportunity to engage and excite the reader. Good vs. Evil is conflict in its purest form, and any sports fan can tell you that competition is a lot of fun.

Take a look at your WIP. Does it have a villain? Does the villain embody the traits listed above? How can your villain be improved?

Who are your favorite villains, and why?

22 comments

Conflict Is The Key

He burned down my house. Killed my wife. Kidnapped my kids. Ate my dog. Left me with two teeth, one eye, and no legs.

I dedicated my life to tracking him down. Chasing him through Europe. Following him back through time. Traveling into outer space. But I never did catch him, so I gave up.

Bad? Stupid? A time waster?

It could be worse. He didn't burn down my house. He just came over to watch the ball game. My wife and kids went to see a movie. We had a few beers, then I went to bed.

Both of these concepts are missing something essential. We all know stories contain a beginning, a middle, and an end. We also know they contain plot, setting, and characters.

But the thing that makes a compelling read, the thing that makes us keep turning the page, is something that a lot of us forget

That thing is conflict.

Conflict is the main ingredient for successful fiction. The question of "What happens next?" is what keeps your audience glued to the page. Not pretty description. Not clever phrasing. Not cute dialog. The motor that drives the story is conflict. The central plot of any story should be centered around a conflict. The sub plots should introduce more conflict. There should be conflict on every page, and even in every paragraph.

Readers don't want characters to be happy. They want them to be tortured for 90,000 words, and then happy at the very end. Maybe. That's the essence of a page-turner.

I like to break conflict down into three steps:

Opposition - That is, something against something else. Man vs. man, animal, nature, death, even himself.

Stakes - When the opposition is defined, what is at stake here? Who risks losing what?

Resolution - How does the conflict end? Is the hero's goal reached? Here's the fun part.

Apply this principle to any narrative you've encountered —movie, TV show, book, comic, short story, cartoon, etc. All of these contain a conflict, probably many conflicts at once.

Now —does your story? It doesn't matter how cool or beautiful your hero is, or how nasty the villain, unless there is turmoil and chaos. Many writers cringe at the prospect of plotting a novel. Eighty thousand words? How can I make one idea stretch that long? It's actually not too hard. Simply put your characters in a worst case scenario, then keep making it even worse.

For example —if I wrote a story about two hit men, this is how I'd add conflict.

- Have them hate each other.
- Hit Man #1 wants out of the business —this is his last job.
- Their target (a terrorist who's planning on blowing up a school) gets away.
- Their bosses threaten to kill them if they don't finish the job.
- Hit man #1 is sleeping with hit man #2's wife.
- Their target begins stalking them, trying to kill them before they kill him.
- Hit Man #2 finds out about the affair, swears to kill #1.

And you can keep upping the ante. The boss eventually sends other hit men after them both. Hit Man #2's son is at the school the terrorist is going to blow up. The wife gets kidnapped. Etc.

If you don't like plotting out a story before you write it, you can do it as you're writing it. Just keep raising the stakes for your characters. Set up goals in the beginning, throw some obstacles in the way, and see if your characters sink or swim. And if your characters do swim, send a few sharks after them!

Theme?

What's this theme thing?

I consider the term *theme* to be interchangeable with *allegory:* a symbolic representation of ideas through a narrative.

Huh?

Actually, it isn't that complicated. Look at fairy tales. Little Red Riding Hood is all about not talking to strangers. Beauty and the Beast is about how looks don't matter when it comes to love. Cinderella is about avoiding a life of hard work by marrying the right guy. And so on.

Sometimes themes in narratives are intentional. Sometimes they're subconscious. Sometimes they are in the eye of the beholder, and have nothing to do with the original intent of the artist.

Having a strong theme in your work is one more thing for the reader to latch on to, identify with, ponder, and enjoy. Human beings strive for meaning, and search for answers. When meaning and answers are also entertaining, they are a lot more palatable, and substantial. Like food that tastes good and is also good for you.

The majority of my writing touches on a recurring theme. It's hidden under jokes and action, but it's there.

In the novels, Jack is never the one who ultimately finishes off the villain. She plays a part in chasing the bad guy, but she isn't the one that kills him.

There is a very specific reason for this. In my personal philosophy, life isn't about reaching goals; it's about chasing goals. You can't always win, because sometimes things are beyond your control. All you can do is try your best, and find ways to live with yourself if your best isn't good enough.

In other words: You're more than your goals.

Jack doesn't realize this yet. But she's slowly learning.

To remind her of this, I surround Jack with characters who all live to serve their base needs —-needs that Jack normally forsakes in search of a higher sense of self.

The secondary characters in my books —Phin, Harry, Mr. Friskers, Jack's Mom, and Herb —all have their basis in the Freudian id.

—Phin values his needs and comfort over all.
—Harry chases fame and money and shirks responsibility.
—Mr. Friskers is angry and demanding.

—Jack's Mom seeks sex and attention.
—Herb eats too much.

Jack, however, represents superego. Her quest to become better, and her ultimate acceptance of the fact that she might not, are the primary elements of her character. She doesn't get the bad guy, but she tries to live with herself anyway.

Addressing this theme by spelling it out is obvious and preachy, and neither of those things are desirable in a narrative. So I use allegorical action to convey the theme.

The insomnia Jack struggles with is representative of her lack of control over her life and goals.

The good night of sleep she always has at the end of the book isn't because she's reached her goals —-it is because she's accepted that the goals are out of her control. Punishing yourself isn't the answer. Which is why the last line of each novel relates to theme.

At the beginning of each book, Jack is 100% committed to catching a killer. This is her primary need, and the motivator that drives the plot.

During each book, Jack interacts with people who indulge themselves rather than deny themselves, as a subconscious reminder to Jack that perhaps her priorities are skewed.

At the end of each book, Jack forgives her failures and embraces life. In other words, catharsis in the form of the final showdown leads to a temporary reprieve from the neurosis, and an acceptance that perhaps her peers have the right attitude.

So the theme of the novels is: *Try the best you can, because trying is all you can do. But if you try too hard, life isn't worth living at all.*

Why did I pick this theme?

I didn't. It picked me. Anyone who regularly reads this blog can see how my quest to become published, and my attitude toward this career, are tied into this philosophy. It's what I struggle with, and what I aspire to.

I'm passionate about this topic, and hopefully some of that passion comes through in the writing.

Do you have any themes in your book? What messages are you imparting to your readers? What philosophies or issues are you planting in their minds? What are you trying to say? How do you convey these ideas without beating your audience over the head with the obvious?

27 comments

Ask But Don't Answer

Writing is a lot like teasing your younger brother with a secret.

The longer you hold it over his head, the more worked up he gets.

All stories, no matter the genre, can benefit from suspense. The tension doesn't have to be in the form of the bad guy stalking the hero. It can be much simpler, much less dramatic, but still make the reader want to keep reading. For example:

"You seem upset," Jack said. "What's up?"

"I'll tell you later." Herb said. "In private."

And we have suspense.

Posing questions, then making the reader keep reading to get the answers, is the essence of the term "page turner."

This why why soap operas are so popular —-nothing is ever solved. This is why the 10 o'clock news gives you a quick teaser of their most interesting story, and doesn't show you the full clip until 10:29.

Ask a question, but don't give the answer right away.

I'm currently writing my fourth Jack Daniels book, DIRTY MARTINI, and my wife demands to read it as I finish each chapter. She was yelling at me yesterday, because I had a scene with the villain surrounded by all of this obscure equipment, but didn't explain what the equipment was.

Wife: What's all that stuff he's using?

Me: You'll find out later.

Wife: Write faster.

Writers need to be teases. It keeps the story moving. It makes the reader want to know what happens next.

Don't give the reader everything at once. Hold stuff back. Feed it to them slowly. Even boring exposition and backstory can become unbearably dramatic if you withhold the information rather than spill it all at once:

"What's wrong with Donna?"

"Oh. She had some... problems, a few years ago."

What works about this method of building suspense is that when you do share your secret with the reader, they feel like they're a part of it. They remember the earlier reference, and are happy to be let in on the game.

This works not only with omitted information, but with seemingly unneeded details.
On page 17: "He got out of the car and pulled the tarp on top of the chemical box."

Then, on page 178, you reveal what the chemicals are for. And the reader goes, "Aha! I wondered what those were for!"

The more seeds you plant, the more fun the read. Just remember: restraint is the key.

54 comments

Copycatting

I have a dirty confession to make.

When my agent was shopping my first Jack Daniels book around to publishers, she compared it to Janet Evanovich. When Hyperion bought the series, they compared it to Janet Evanovich. I also began comparing my books to Evanovich's, because hers had a female lead and were funny, as were mine, and many people told me they were similar. Reviewers mentioned it. Blurbers mentioned it. My publisher thought enough of the comparison to make my book covers brightly colored, easily mistaken at a distance for those of the Divine Miss E.

I'd always intended to read Evanovich. Really. But as my career took off, I spent all my time reading for blurbs, or to help newbies, or the books of my friends, and I never got around to reading any Janet. Even though I continued to compare my books to hers.

I recently had an offer from Benbella books to write an essay about Janet Evanovich for an upcoming book. I like Benbella (they are releasing a collection of James Bond essays this summer, which includes a funny one by me) so I said yes.

In order to write this essay, I thought it prudent to read the Stephanie Plum series. Which I've been doing. And it has shocked me. Why?

Because my writing is awfully similar to Janet Evanovich's.

If someone reads Janet's books, and then my books, they could easily think I was imitating her. But I'm not. It would be a neat trick, copying someone I've never read.

Still, some of the similarities are eerie. Stephanie's screwed-up life is similar to Jack's, her Grandma Mazur is similar to Jack's Mom, her partner Lula is similar to Jack's partner Herb, Ranger is similar to Phin, and the goofy characters and the dialog strike similar chords. I wondered how this could be. First I considered evolution, and common ancestors.

When I was younger, I read Robert B. Parker, and Ed McBain, and John D. MacDonald, and Rob Kantner, and Dave Barry, and Lawrence Block. If I was imitating any writing styles when I first started out, it was their styles. Perhaps it was the same for Ms. Evanovich. If she's a Spenser fan, that could be the link; we both imitate Parker. What's strange is that when you read Parker's Sunny Randall books, they seem like much more of a rip-off of Evanovich than my books, but in reality they are just a female version of Spenser.

Perhaps there are only so many ways to create likeable series characters. They should be flawed, somewhat neurotic, have goofy larger-than-life sidekicks, and the same goals and dreams that all people have. It is possible, even likely, that similar books can arise independent of one another.

The Jack books have some Robert Parker type wisecracks in them. They also have some Thomas Harris scares and some Richard Stark noir. But ultimately, they are Konrath. At this point in my career, my style

is my own, and I like to think it's pretty distinguishable. And, hopefully, some new writer is reading my stuff and imitating the hell out of it.

As for Janet —-the first nine books in the series are a lot of fun. If you like Jack, check them out.

12 comments

Bad Stories

I'm a judge for a writing contest, being held by an organization that shall remain nameless.

Being a judge involves reading over a thousand short stories written by newbies.

It's a painful job.

Ninety-nine percent of the entries share similar problems. These problems occur with such frequency that I've decided to write a story to illustrate them.

In the following short, try to spot all of the things that would make it a losing entry:

THE CHURCH ON BY JOE KONRATH

It was a very sunny day in the spring of 2004 in fact it was so sunny, that even the sun had to wear sunglasses! It was on this very sunny day that I first met my wife. Her name was Rhoda, and she loved life. She lived in a house at 8786 Cranberry road, with her mother and three dogs named Sharpie, Bull, and Doxie, who are a Sharpei, a bulldog, and a doxhund. Boy were those dogs trouble! Yes they were! Trouble spelled T-R-O-U-B-L-E with a capitol T! But Rhonda loved those dogs, so much, that I never would have guessed, how it all ended up. And, boy, did it end up, bad! On a very cloudy day in the fall of 2006, Rhonda took the dogs out for a walk, but you can actually say that they walked her. Those were some frisky dogs! As they all walk to my house, Sharpie sniffe d out a skunk and got squirted, which smelled even worse. Sharpe thought it was a cat, but he sure was surprised! When Rhonda brought the dogs into my house, boy was I ever really very upset.
"You need to get that foul smelling pooch into a bath of half tomato juice and half vinegar and half baking soda!" I loudly exclaimed with a huge frown creasing my unhappy face.
"But Sharpie is allergic to tomato juice!" proclaimed RHonda as she stamps her foot and pouts with her hands on her hips cocked out like a diva.
""I not asking the pooch to drink any tomato juice, just take a bath in it!" I loudly laughed hard.
The next week I proposed to Rohnda, and we were married at St. Vincent's Church on 472 Smith street on a very sunny spring day and Sharpie was supposed to be the ring barer with a little pillow tied to his back but guess what? He got into another skunk right before the ceremony! That screwy pooch just didn't learn better! So Sharpie comes runnin down the isle and everyone in the church is holding their noses. They were literaly in the pews saying PEE YOO. Now I wasn't going to say my vows wearing a light tan medium wooden closepin on my nose, so I told my best man Zeke to take Sharpie out of that church but make sure to bring back the rings so we coudl still salvage this disaster. Four minutes later, Zeke locked out Sharpie outside the church but guess what?!? Now he smelled like skunk! I should have known to bring some tomato juice to my wedding day!
I told him ""Sorry Zeke my best man but you have to wait out outside the chucrh with Sharpie" I said funnily because I am holding my nose! Everyone laughed especially my bride as Zeke stomped dejectedly out of the church like an unclean leper. He felt so terrible he wanted to go jump in a lake, and he thought maybe he should because that will get some of the skunk stink off but he couldn't because the tuxedo was rented!. The next year Rhonda died of pnemonia and cancer, but I still have the dogs to remind me of her, and I love little Shapie but I always keep some tomato juice around just in case!

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And yes, unfortunately, some of the stories are this bad. But mostly this is an amalgamation of the many things wrong with newbie short stories.

Some of the errors are obvious. Some are a bit harder to spot. But there are close to a hundred faults, any one of which would make me stop reading and file the story in the trash.

How many can you spot? I'm not looking for a blow-by-blow list, but rather general rules, such as spelling problems and changing tense.

38 comments

Become A Successful Crime Writer In Just Six Easy Steps

So you want to be a crime writer? Or maybe you don't, but you've read the rest of the magazine and you want to get your money's worth by reading everything. Whatever your reason for reading this, remember that the only thing keeping you from a career writing crime fiction is commitment, persistence, and a bunch of editors who wouldn't know talent if it bit them in the face.

Step #1: Read. Forget the old saying write *what you know.* The main character of my series is a forty-seven year old female cop, and last time I checked I wasn't any of those things. Instead of writing what you know, *write what you like to read.* Writing in a genre you aren't familiar with is like racing the Indy 500 without taking a single driving lesson. Except for the fatalities.

Read the classics and the bestsellers, but don't forget new authors —-first books by contemporary authors are a good way to see what publishers are currently looking for. Fun Hint: Try that JA Konrath guy, I hear he's pretty good.

Step #2: Outline. Would you build a house without blueprints? Then why would you write a book without an outline? Are you crazy? Have you seen a psychiatrist about that?

Many new writers feel like they can wing it, and usually around page 50 the story comes to a grinding halt and gets parked in a drawer until they die. That's because writing a book without a plan is like riding a tiger —-impossible to tame and hard to predict. It also chafes the thighs.

An outline doesn't have to be dozens of pages long, incorporating every scene, twist, and point. It simply needs to be the framework on which you hang your story. First, give your hero a goal. In crime fiction, the goal is usually solving a crime or preventing a crime. Hence the term *crime fiction.*

Once you have a crime (murder is good), make life tough for your hero and do everything you can to stop her from solving or preventing the crime. This is called *plotting*, though several times reviewers of my books have gotten confused and used the word *plodding.* Those zany reviewers.

Step #3: Write. This is the hard part. Schedule time for writing, then actually force yourself to sit at your writing spot. Limit distractions like the Internet, phone calls, and communication with family members, even if they're on fire. If you want to be a writer, you have to make writing a priority. You can extinguish Little Timmy later.

Step #4: Keep Writing. It's easy to get stuck. If this happens, here are a few tricks to help you.

- **Add some gratuitous sex and violence.** Be sure to include revealing dialog in these scenes, so when your editor tries to cut them later, you can tell her the scenes are essential, because of that revealing dialog.
- **Kill someone.** If the story starts getting boring, you can always add a few murders. If it's really boring, try killing your hero. This is much easier if you aren't using a first-person POV.

- **Call me.** I'm pretty good at this stuff. If you're stuck, gimme a hollar, and we'll work through your problems together. I love helping new writers. Because I'm a nice guy, And because I charge $1800 and hour.

Step #5: Edit. Rewriting and editing is where you take a good book and make it great by cutting out all of the fat, exposition, and unnecessary action and dialog. Be firm. With practice, you can easily par a 90,000 word manuscript down to 17. Start by eliminating all the verbs.

Step #6: Sell It For A Lot Of Money. Finally, the easy part. I'd go into more detail, but unfortunately I'm running out of space on this page. Of course, you're always welcome to call me for the simple solution. Just make sure you have a credit card handy.

The Elements of Dialog

Dialog is one of the most important componants of story, for many reasons.

- It relays important information and moves the story forward
- It shows what a character is thinking, feeling, doing
- It can be funny, scary, sad, dramatic
- It breaks up the visual monotony of large, clunky paragraphs
- It reads quickly
- It can be the most memorable part of a narrative

But what makes good dialog? What are the things to do and to avoid when writing dialog?

Here are the rules that I personally use.

1. Make it sound natural. People talk differently than they write. Writing is slower, more deliberate, and more thought goes into it. Speaking is looser, freer, less constricting, and less precise. Record some dialog in natural settings —at the mall, on the phone, on the radio. Then transcribe what you heard. You'll notice a big difference between the spoken word and the written word.

2. It shouldn't be too natural. In real life, people use speach hesitators (um, uh) and repeat themseves a lot. They also can talk for mintues at a time without a break. In your narrative, you need to cut to the chase, and trim all of this extraneous stuff. Briefer is better.

3. It has to have a point. Stories are built around conflict. It should be in your dialog as well. Two people discussing the weather happens all the time in real life, but there's no place for it in a novel (unless the book is about an evil weatherman.) Dialog needs to propel the story forward. Keep it moving, and use it to reveal things about the plto and the characters.

4. Speaker attribution only when needed. Dialog tags are distracting. They interrupt the flow and cadance of the words. Use 'he said', and only use it sparingly. Tags like *yelled, shouted, screamed, sobbed, laughed,* usually aren't needed. Neither are adverbs. *Said loudly, softly, cruelly, jokingly, stupidly* —-that gets old really quick. Using action instead of tags to denote who is speaking is a better way to do the scene.

5. Remember the scene. Where are these characters talking? The environment, the situation, the position of their bodies, the action; all of this is important, but not as important as you think. Less is more. Give the reader just enough information to imagine the scene, and then get on with the story. Over-describing every detail is annoying, and bad writing.

6. Avoid dialect. Some authors are great at dialect. You aren't one of them. Avoid creative spelling, which makes words unrecognizable, just so the reader knows your character is Italian, or Southern, or from Bahston, because the reader has to look at a word three times to realize you mean Boston.

7. Avoid funky punctuation. A few exclamation points is fine. More than a few a chapter is overkill. Ditto italics, apostrophes, and double punctuation. *Know* wha' I'm *sayin'*??!!??!?

8. Different characters speak in different ways. A cop wouldn't speak a line the same was a criminal would. While you should avoid dialect, it's okay to use improper grammar or vocabulary if it sounds authentic. Write like people speak, even if it ain't right.

9. Read it aloud. When you've finished a scene, read it out loud to see if it works. If you're tripping over the words, the character would be too. If it doesn't sound natural, it won't read natural. After reading it aloud, you'll find that you can take words away pretty easily.

Bringing it all together. Here's a brief snippet from Bloody Mary which hits all of the points mentioned above. Read it in your head once, then read it aloud. Look for what's on the page, as well as what is deliberately left off the page.

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The apartment was air-conditioned, neat, nicely furnished. An entertainment center, crammed full of state-of-the-art equipment, sat next to a wide-screen TV.

Colin stood about Benedict's height, but rail thin. He wore an oversized Steelers jersey and a thick gold chain around his neck that seemed to weigh him down.

"Business must be good." I eyed his place, annoyed that the crooks always had better stuff than I did.

Colin shrugged.

"Colin?" A woman's voice came from one of the back rooms. "Who's there?"

"No one, Mama. Stay in your room."

"Mama know you deal?" I asked.

"I don't deal. That's all a big misunderstanding."

I fished through the pockets of my blazer and took out a folded head-shot of Davi McCormick.

"Do you recognize this woman?"

I watched Colin's face. He glanced at the photo without changing his expression.

"Never saw her."

"She called your cell phone a few days ago."

"Don't got no cell phone."

I read the phone number to him.

"Don't got that phone no more. Lost it."

"When did you lose it?"

"Couple weeks ago."

Herb bent down, reaching for Colin's foot.

"I think you dropped something, Colin. Well–-lookee here."

Herb held up the bag of powdered sugar.

"Dog, that ain't mine!"

Herb made an innocent face. "I saw it fall out of your pocket. Didn't you, Jack?"

"I don't even deal that shit, man. I just distribute the herb."

"Where's your phone, Colin?"

"I told you, I lost the phone."

Benedict dipped a finger into the baggie, then touched his tongue.

"How much you think is here? Eight, ten grams? That's what–-thirty years?"

I moved closer to Colin. "We found the arms. We know she called you."

"What arms? I don't carry, man. I'm low-key."

"Where's the phone?"

"I don't know."

Colin looked frightened. Though I couldn't arrest him for possession of a known confectionary, I decided to push my luck.

"You know the drill, Colin. On your knees, hands behind your head."

"I don't have the phone! I swear! You need to ask your people!"

"What people?"

"Cops. When I got arrested last month, they took my phone. I never got it back."

Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed Herb was dipping back into the baggie for another taste. I stepped between him and Colin.

"You're saying we have your phone?"

"I had it with me when I got booked, and when I got sprung no one knew anything about my phone."

I had a pretty good internal BS detector, and Colin was either a much better liar than I was used to, or he was telling the truth.

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Will I win a Pulitzer for that dialog? No —the comittee sadly passed. But it did do all of the things I mentioned dialog should do.

I wrote this over two years ago, and looking at it now I'd tweak a bit here and there. But it still works as a scene. It sounds right. The reader can picture what's happening, and who is talking, even though it is under-described and there are four different characters. The story is being moved forward, and at a quick pace. Plus, I threw in a bit of humor to make it go down a little easier.

Dialog can be the most fun, and the easiest, part of a story to write.

19 comments

Humor Me

I've been told that death is easy, but comedy... that's hard.

Actually, it's not as hard as you might think.

Laughter is simply our brain reacting to discord and fear.

Discord is something unexpected, inappropriate, unusual, or exaggerated.

A fat guy on a little bicycle is funny, because our minds see the absurd dichotomy of a large man and a small vehicle.

Fear is the distance and disconnect associated with bad events that we don't want to happen to us.

A fat guy on little bicycle, peddling very fast because he's on fire, is funny because we can picture ourselves being on fire and it's not a pleasant image.

Conversely, the fat guy in the Burn Ward, getting his dead skin brushed off by a heartless nurse, is not a funny image. Unless the fat guy is also a clown. Clowns are funny.

Just about every joke you've ever heard is based on these principles. Knock knock jokes go for the unexpected. Puns are all about substituting meanings. When Moe hits Curly with shovel, we're secretly glad we're not Curly. Or Moe. Or anyone in that gene pool.

Whenever there is some kind of tragedy, jokes spring up as a way for people to deal with it. When horrible things happen, humor is used to lighten the situation and to increase the distance between the affected and the observer.

The trick to writing humor is observation. What is a normal situation, and how could that become absurd?

The trick to writing humor in fiction is to use these absurd observations to add to the suspense of the scene, and to forward the story.

Here's a scene that I cut out of DIRTY MARTINI. I think it's amusing, but it took away from the action rather than added to the action. This was right after several police offers have been horribly killed. Jacqueline Daniels, the hero, is at the crime scene with Police Superintendent O'Loughlin (a woman), Rick (an FBI Agent) and Harry McGlade, who needs a favor from Jack.

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I couldn't tell if she was kidding or not, but even though I didn't agree with our new Superintendent, I was starting to like her.

But damn, she needed some fashion tips. Hadn't this woman ever heard of shoulder pads? Her blazer made her look like the humpback witch from Snow White.

"Hey, you. The chunky one in the suit. You look like you're in charge."

The Super eyed McGlade as he strutted over. He waved a piece of paper at her.

"This is how much the city of Chicago owes me for that space suit."

"Six people have died," O'Loughlin said evenly.

"You don't owe me for them. Just the suit."

When she didn't take Harry's receipt, he stuffed it into her jacket pocket.

"Now about this liquor license," he said to me. "The mayor of this toddling town has refused to let me open a bar because of some silly misunderstanding that happened between me and one of his ugly nieces. I hit it to get on the family's good side, but she was a real cave troll. I needed two Viagra and still had to prop a Hustler on her back." McGlade grimaced. "She had a beard, Jack. It was like kissing my grandfather, except with tongue. So I don't call her the next morning, mostly because my face is chapped raw, and she goes crying to Uncle Big Shot and now I'm persona non grata."

Rick asked me, "Who is this guy?"

"That's Harry. He's a kindergarten teacher, works with special needs kids."

"He's annoying me," the Super said. "He needs to go away."

McGlade grinned at O'Loughlin in a way I'm sure he thought was endearing.

"You look like you haven't been laid in the last decade. Put in a good word for me with the mayor, and I'll step up to the plate." He squinted at her chin. "Got a razor at your place?"

The Super called over two patrolmen, and had McGlade arrested. He offered up some prime examples of current urban colloquialisms as they carted him off.

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Now let's analyze the jokes in this scene.

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I couldn't tell if she was kidding or not, but even though I didn't agree with our new Superintendent, I was starting to like her.

But damn, she needed some fashion tips. Hadn't this woman ever heard of shoulder pads? Her blazer made her look like the humpback witch from Snow White. **Humorous image, comparing a bad blazer to a cartoon witch.**

"Hey, you. The chunky one in the suit. You look like you're in charge." **Absurdity —you don't speak to authority figures like this.**

The Super eyed McGlade as he strutted over. He waved a piece of paper at her.

"This is how much the city of Chicago owes me for that space suit."

"Six people have died," O'Loughlin said evenly.

"You don't owe me for them. Just the suit." **Fear —making light of a tragic situation by downplaying it.**

When she didn't take Harry's receipt, he stuffed it into her jacket pocket.

"Now about this liquor license," he said to me. "The mayor of this toddling town has refused to let me open a bar because of some silly misunderstanding that happened between me and one of his ugly nieces. I hit it to get on the family's good side, but she was a real cave troll. I needed two Viagra and still had to prop a Hustler on her back." **Inappropriate, rude, absurd image.**

McGlade grimaced. "She had a beard, Jack. It was like kissing my grandfather, except with tongue. **Absurd image.** So I don't call her the next morning, mostly because my face is chapped raw, and she goes crying to Uncle Big Shot and now I'm persona non grata." **Hyperbole —exaggeration for comedic effect.**

Rick asked me, "Who is this guy?"

"That's Harry. He's a kindergarten teacher, works with special needs kids." **Discord —Harry is obviously a selfish pig, not a Kindergarten teacher.**

"He's annoying me," the Super said. "He needs to go away."

McGlade grinned at O'Loughlin in a way I'm sure he thought was endearing.

"You look like you haven't been laid in the last decade. Put in a good word for me with the mayor, and I'll step up to the plate." He squinted at her chin. "Got a razor at your place?" **Absurdity —he won't get his way by acting like this, but is too dumb to realize it.**

The Super called over two patrolmen, and had McGlade arrested. He offered up some prime examples of current urban colloquialisms as they carted him off.

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I didn't mind cutting this scene, because it didn't add to the story much. The bit of story I had to convey was that McGlade needed Jack to help him with the mayor. Everything else was extraneous. So the scene was axed.

It's okay to go off on small tangents, but in this case it was taking away from the scene rather than adding to it.

Now here's a scene in WHISKEY SOUR that made the final cut. Jack is overburdened with work, trying to catch a serial killer, and she's forced to deal with the FBI. I wanted to parody the almost preternatural detecting power FBI agents often have in books, so I made my Special Agents, Dailey and Coursey, so by-the-book they were absurd.

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"For example," Coursey took over, "our suspect is a male Caucasian, between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-nine. He's right-handed, and owns a station wagon or truck. He's blue collar, probably a factory worker, possibly in the textiles industry. He is an alcoholic, and prone to violent rages. He frequents western bars and enjoys line dancing."

"Line dancing," I said.

"He also wears women's underwear," Dailey added. "Possibly his mother's."

I felt a headache coming on.

"As a juvenile he set fires and committed relations with animals."

"With animals," I said.

"There's a high probability he's been arrested before. Possibly for assault or rape, probably on elderly women."

"But he's impotent now."

"He may also be gay."

I lifted my coffee cup to my lips and found it was empty. I lowered it again.

"He hears voices."

"Or maybe just one voice."

"It could be the voice of his mother, telling him to kill."

"Maybe she just wants her underwear back," I offered.

"He may be disfigured or disabled. He might have severe acne scars, or scoliosis."

"That's a curvature of the spine," Dailey added.

"Is that a hunch?" I asked.

"Just an educated guess."

I thought about explaining the joke to them, but it would be wasted.

"He may have been dropped on his head as a child," Coursey said.

He probably wasn't the only one.

"Gentlemen," I wasn't sure where to begin, but I gave it a try. "Call me a skeptic, but I don't see how any of this is going to help us catch him."

"First of all, you should start staking out western bars."

"And local textile factories that have hired someone with a criminal record within the last six months."

"I could stake out the zoo, too," I said. "He may be sneaking in at night and committing relations with animals."

"I doubt it," Coursey furrowed his brow. "The profile says he's impotent now."

I rubbed my eyes. When I finished, the two of them were still here.

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This scene was kept in, even though it is a slight diversion from the plot, because it adds conflict to the story. Jack is forced to work with these guys, and they are hindering her from doing her job. Unlike the humor in the first scene, where I was being funny just to be funny, the humor in this scene has a point and adds to the suspense and tension of the story.

Here's one more scene, from RUSTY NAIL. Harry McGlade has been kidnapped, along with Jack's friend Phineas Troutt. Phin wakes up tied to a chair, with Harry tied up behind him.

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A sound, a low rumble, comes from behind him. Phin can't turn far enough to see. It comes again, louder.

Snoring.

"Hey! Wake up!"

"I'm awake. I'm awake."

More snoring.

"Goddamnit, McGlade, wake up!"

"Huh? What's happening?"

"We were drugged at your wedding."

"I got drunk at my wedding? There's a shocker."

"Drugged, McGlade. We were drugged."

"Is that you, Jim?"

"It's Phin. Wake up and tell me what you see."

A long pause. Phin wonders if the moron fell asleep again.

"I'm in a chair, tied up. Looks like some kind of factory or warehouse. There's a cargo docking bay off to my right, but the door is closed."

"What else?"

"We gotta get out of here, Phin. If I don't get this tuxedo returned by tonight, they're charging me for another full day."

"Concentrate, Harry. What else is around you?"

"There's some kind of office in the corner. Door closed, no lights. On my left... holy shit!"

"What is it?"

"This has got to be some kind of bad dream."

McGlade yells in pain.

"Harry? You okay?"

"I bit my tongue to see if I'm dreaming. I don't think I am. Or maybe I bit my tongue in my sleep..."

"You're not asleep, Harry. Tell me what you see."

"I think my tongue's bleeding."

"Harry!"

"Okay. I see a long steel table. Got a bunch of equipment on it. And some stuff, new in boxes."

Phin doesn't like the sound of that.

"What kind of stuff?"

"A blow torch. A power drill. A set of vice-grip pliers. And a chainsaw."

This has gone from bad to worse.

"Maybe they're building a birdhouse," McGlade says.

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Again, the humor adds to the suspense of the scene. McGlade's attitude isn't the attitude of someone who is about to be tortured to death, and that is funny. But their situation isn't funny, and that's why the humor works. Something horrible is going to happen.

And later, something horrible does happen. And again I use humor, or rather my characters use humor, in order to deal with the horror.

Is humor needed in books? Does it make them better? Should you include humor in your work?

My answer is a resounding *maybe*.

Real life is humorous. People laugh all the time. Studies have shown that laughter, and smiling, are ridiculously healthy activities. Comedy has been around for thousands of years, and for good reason: People enjoy it.

Laughter brings people together, and laughter can make your reader enjoy your writing more. People like to be around those who make them laugh, and your characters are no exception.

Humor can make your hero more relatable, empathetic, likeable, charismatic, sympathetic, important, and identifiable.

Humor also can set a tone, capture a mood, make the reader more of a participant in the story, and become something you're known for, like Dave Barry, Janet Evanovich, and Carl Hiaasen.

Whether humor is right for your story depends on the story you're telling. Steven Speilberg knew this, and wisley cut the pie-fight scene from Schindler's List. But I believe that most stories can be enhanced by humor, even if humor isn't the main goal.

James Rollins is known for his over-the-top technothrillers. My favorite James Rollins book, ICE HUNT, features a brash loudmouth commando named Kowalski, who has some incredibly funny lines and scenes. His new one, BLACK ORDER, also has several laugh aloud moments, and this adds to the book rather than hurts the tension, because you become more attached to the characters and more fearful for their lives. Plus, it's fun to laugh.

Barry Eisler's first novel, RAIN FALL, wasn't without it's wry moments. But in recent titles, most notably KILLING RAIN and THE LAST ASSASSIN, Rain's friend Dox supplies a great deal of humor, much of it riotous. Besides being funny, Dox helps the reader to better empathize with Rain by showing a softer side of him.

Two of my favorite new writers, Jeff Shelby and Harry Hunsicker, walk the line invented by Robert B. Parker and use liberal amounts of humor mixed in with the tension and violence. Because of this, their characters are more instantly likeable than the darker, brooding heroes that populate noir and hardboiled ficiton.

One of my favorite writers, David Ellis, has an incredibly dry sense of humor in person, but this has been mostly absent from his legal thrillers. His most recent, EYE OF THE BEHOLDER, features a first-person narrative and several very funny lines and observations. Because of this, I identified more closely with his hero, and became more afraid for him than I had in any of the previous novels.

I believe that humor for humor's sake doesn't work. But if used to add to the story, to enhance a scene, and to develop characters, humor is something that is greatly appreciated by readers, and it can make a book even better.

So how do you know if you're funny or not?

Humor is subjective. Very subjective. Some people like the droll wit of Oscar Wilde. Some people wet their pants watching Rob Schneider get kicked in the groin (who are these people and how can we stop

them?) It's entirely possible that something you think is funny will fall flat. This will happen. Even the best comedians have jokes that bomb.

There are three steps to figuring out if your joke is funny or not.

1. Do you find it funny? Chances are, you won't laugh at your own jokes (I rarely if ever do.) But I use the above criteria to recognize where jokes fit into the narrative, and can make a guess if it works or not.

2. After writing a joke, I test it by giving it to readers. My wife. Mom. Writing friends. Close friends. Agent. Editor. None are afraid to tell me, "That's not funny." They'll also tell me where they laughed. Or I'll watch them read and ask them.

3. If the readers are laughing, or if they aren't, figure out why. It's very much a process of evolution. Sometimes the idea behind a joke works, but the timing is off. Or the wording is off.

The more you learn, the better you get. My test is: If one person laughs, and one doesn't, it stays. If no one laughs, it goes.

37 comments

Self-Critiquing

Perhaps the hardest thing about writing is judging one's own work. Taste is subjective; anyone can read a novel and give their opinion, with points to back it up. But when the mind behind an opinion must critique its own creation, catharsis ensues. I know what I like, and I write what I know, but how can I judge what I have created when I use the same mind for both? The answer is, I can't. Just as potty training toddlers are so proud of their mastery they want to show everyone their doo-doo, we as writers cannot separate pride from opinion. Self-editing is a grueling task, and trying to incorporate critiques or advice into revisions is akin to pulling out one's own teeth. So here's some Novocain. I've learned three techniques that help make self-reflection more accurate. Instead of deluding ourselves that the very first draft, aside from a few typos, is ready for Pulitzer submission, these exercises will help us trade rose colored glasses for the magnifying kind.

1. Read everything out loud

This deceptively easy trick will not only help with errors, it will also give you a better feel for the piece and where it is going. Wordiness and redundancies are hard to spot on paper, but they're exposed when rolling off the tongue. Keep in mind that we all have a voice in our head when we read something, but we also use that same voice when we're writing something. It's easy to confuse the two. By reading your work out loud, you can make a distinct separation from what you thought, and what is actually on the page.

This method of divorcing yourself from your ideas is the difference between the pros and the amateurs. Find an author you like, read their prose aloud, and try to compare it to yours. Unless you've been commercially published, theirs is better. Figure out why Stephen King is a better writer than you, and maybe one day he won't be.

2. Never listen to praise

Praise is like chocolate —we love to eat it up, but it isn't good for us. Being told something is good doesn't help you get better. We're writers. We write because we feel we have a pretty good mastery of the language and a lot of ideas to share. To seek praise for a well turned sentence, while ego inflating, is not going to bring us any closer to our goal. That goal, of course, is publication.

There is ALWAYS something that can be fixed, edited, or told in a better way. To paraphrase Hemingway, writing is never completed, it is simply due. When asking for opinions, you want to know what didn't work, what needs to be fixed, how it can be made stronger. Ask questions and demand details. A simple critique of "It sucks" is no more help than, "It was great." Find out why the reader didn't like something. Then get an opinion from someone else, and question them on the point of contention. If most of the people who read a piece tell you to change it, change it. They're right.

3. Put the writing away

When you've finished something, move onto something else before you tackle a full scale edit. Two weeks is good. A month is better. If you can avoid editing for a year, then that's the best of all. The more you're able to forget what you've written, the more you'll be able to spot its flaws when you read it again.

As an experiment, dig up something you wrote a year ago, read it out loud, and write down ten things that should be changed to make it better. Force yourself to do more than just switch commas or replace synonyms. The point of creation, whether it is a poem or an epic novel, is an ego boost. Ego will not allow you to see the work as others do.

Don't we all know someone who carries photos of their ugly baby and always looks for excuses to show them off, beaming with pride each time? The pictures are lying to her, just as the mirror lies to us. We must regain objectivity if the piece is to be successful. Distance=objectivity.

4. Get the scissors

A friend taught me this. You may have the right words, but the wrong order. Don't be afraid to print up a manuscript and then attack it with a razor and a roll of tape. Switching chapters, paragraphs and sentences can sometimes make a good piece into a great one. Seeing your words all hacked gives you a greater freedom to manipulate them. Why do so many people buy those refrigerator poetry magnets? It's fun, and sometimes very effective, to slice and dice.

By working with these four suggestions, we can force the mirror to show us the real thing. What it shows may be ugly, but a pencil is the perfect plastic surgeon.

Down in the Infodumps

You know what I'm talking about. Those big chunks of information that are essential to the story, but which most readers skip.

I'm currently writing a passage about a toxic substance. The reader needs to know what this substance does, how it works, and why it is so dangerous, because that sets up the suspense in several key scenes further down the road.

But laundry lists and textbook definitions aren't interesting. So these are the sneaky tricks I'm using to force the info down the reader's throat:

1. I'm breaking the info into snippets of dialog. One character asks an important question, the answer imparts info. Dialog is active, not passive.

2. I'm breaking up the info with conflict —two of the characters in the scene are flirting, and one is acting like a jerk.

3. I'm putting in just a little less information than needed, and allowing the reader to fill in the blanks and make the logic jumps. Less is more, even when infodumping.

4. I'm purposely leaving some questions unanswered. This turns exposition into part of the tension, making readers wait a bit for more info to fully understand what is happening.

5. I'm keeping it brief. Readers care about the story, not about information, no matter how interesting it may be.

Also, when infodumping, use style. Bland, unexciting writing can make even the most revelatory disclosure boring. Some clever turns of phrase, or even a joke, can turn an infodump into a memorable scene.

All medicine goes better with a spoon full of sugar.

20 comments

Size Does Matter

How long should your story be?

a) as long as it takes to tell

b) a predetermined length that automatically fills a slot

If you picked b) you have a much better chance of selling your work.

Short stories usually have length limitations, due to space constraints. It's much easier to find a market for something 5k than 15k.

And whenever you speak of length, speak in terms of word count, NOT page numbers. Someone using hevlecta 10pt single space can cram 700 words on a page, while an arial 14pt double-spacer with a lot of dialog might fit 150. (for the record, use courier 12pt double space, 1 inch margins, unless you know it's okay to do otherwise)

You should find out the writer's guidelines for length for a particular market before you begin —after all, why write anything without knowing who might buy it?

But if I am writing without a market in mind, I try to keep my shorts between 1500 and 7500 words.

If I go over 7500, I cut. And if I've learned one thing, it's that EVERYTHING can be cut.

Why keep it that length? I edited an anthology (coming out next year from Bleak House Books) and I learned that if given the choice between two 3000 words stories, and a 6000 words story, I go with the two.

When you pick up an antho or a magazine, do you read it cover to cover? Or do you skip around, sampling this story and that story? And which stories do you read first?

In my case, it's the shortest ones.

Every word should count in a narrative, and if you can make it shorter, you should. Didn't Hemingway have some kind of comment about, "I apologize for the length, I didn't have time to make it shorter?"

As for novels, there are no rules set in stone, but this is what I've noticed.

First novels have a better chance of selling if they are under 90k.

The reason is wholly monetary. Your publisher will probably lose money on your first book. But a 150k book will cost more to print, more to ship, and less will fit in a carton. Cost of production figures heavily into a publisher's decision whether to buy or not to buy.

Some genres, such as fantasy and historical romance, tend to be lengthier.

If your book is under 60k, it will have a harder time finding a buyer, both through a publisher and through a customer.

Fiction has set prices. Around 6 bucks for a paperback, 13 bucks for trade paper, and 24 dollars for a hardcover. Some are slightly more or less. Bestsellers command higher prices (I've seen a lot of 29 dollar price tags) but then they're discounted 30%.

So chances are your book will be about $24. A consumer will look at a thin 60K word book, and a thicker 100K word book, see they're both the same price, and assume bigger is better.

It's unlikely a publisher will price your book lower because it's shorter, for the same reason Shell sells gas comparable to Mobil —they want to stay competitive.

Are there exceptions? Always. But if you're trying to break into this business, which is hard enough, why stack even more odds against yourself?

Whiskey Sour was 68k. The hardcover was 270 pages, and it was 45 chapters.

Bloody Mary was 71k, 307 pages, 53 chapters.

Rusty Nail was 78k, 289 pages, 54 chapters.

Same font size/style/typesetting for all of them, so why do the numbers seem strange?

The page count/word count ratio changes, depending on how much dialog is in a book. Dialog takes up page space, but involves less words.

Rusty Nail was more action in it than Whiskey Sour, which had more dialog.

This brings up another point: White space.

Be aware of white space. Readers like dialog. They like looking at a page and seeing a lot of white space. Long, clunky paragraphs are intimidating.

Have you ever watched someone browse? They'll flip through a few pages, and you can see the gears in their heads turning as they think: *Do I have time to read this? Will it be fun or a chore? Can I finish it in one or two sittings? Does it have long chapters, or short ones I can finish before I go to sleep or while I take a bath?*

Think about your own reading habits. What do you like to see on a page? What makes a book look inviting, before you've even read a single word?

In my younger days, when I needed to buy some classic for some college class, I'd crack open different editions and find the one that was the most eye-friendly. Big font, not a lot of words crammed on each page.

Dialog makes a book more eye-friendly. At least, to my inner reader.

If I have a paragraph that lasts for more than half the page, I try to break it up. If I have a chapter that lasts longer than 15 pages (3700 words) I try to break it up.

Your words should be good, but also be aware of how they look on the page. Are they enticing your eyes to lock onto random bits of dialog or action? Or do they look boring?

Readers skip long paragraphs.

I randomly picked 5 pages from each of my three novels, to see how many paragraphs they averaged per page (by couting the indents.)

Whiskey Sour averaged 16.8 paragraphs per page. Bloody Mary was 13.4. Rusty Nail was 14.4.

Overall, if you open one of my books, you'll see 14.8 indents per full page.

Let's look at some other authors (hardcover editions.) Here are some bestsellers:

ONE SHOT by Lee Child - 16.6 paraphs per page
CHILL OF FEAR by Kay Hooper - 11.4 per page
TO THE NINES by Jaent Evanovich - 13.8 per page
SCARECROW by Matt Reilly - 16.4 per page
VANISH by Tess Gerritsen - 15.8 per page
STONE COLD by Robert Parker - 17 per page

Here are some debuts:

HUNDREDTH MAN by Jack Kerley - 13.8 per page
BAHAMARAMA by Bob Morris - 13 per page
MISDEMEANOR MAN by Dylan Schaffer - 16.2 per page
KILLER SWELL by Jeff Shelby - 14 per page
STILL RIVER by Harry Hunsicker - 11.8

What does any of this mean?

Well, if you write mysteries or thrillers, it means to avoid long paragraphs, and have a lot of dialog.

Besides looking good on a page, this also has the side-effect of making the books move faster.

By comparision, I went through some POD books that I have from previous contests I've judged.

I looked through three of them. They averaged 7.2 paragraphs a page.

Draw your own conclusions.

25 comments

Pain-Free Rewriting

I have killed. With my hands I have hacked and slashed and chopped. I have even, on occasion, pieced back together the mutilated remains, joining parts like a Frankenstein. And I am better for it.

It isn't easy to begin cutting —the sharp instrument in hand, the fear and trepidation. How dare I kill my children? My little legacies, born of my blood and sweat...from fruit of the womb to grist for the mill.

I started with adjectives. Adverbs soon followed. The 'said' clones were next —replied, queried, questioned, declared, yelled, lamented —killed and buried.

But what of beautifully detailed descriptions? What of prose of a rose so sweet the reader can smell it in the page? Not essential to the plot. Kill it.

Exposition didn't die easy. It fought like a wounded bear. I couldn't stamp the life completely out, so I cleverly hid plot devices in dialogue and brief sentences.

Simile and metaphor were like two giant monsters, harder to kill than an army of rats, endless as boring lectures, repeated more often than Lewinsky jokes, like two great —see what I mean about hard to kill?

Backstory posed a problem. The reason it posed a problem is because many years ago, when I was much younger, I knew a —SNIP!

A character's backstory should be a few sentences at most. If it drags into pages, it ain't backstory, dammit!

Harder still, was cutting story. Being able to spot a stray adverb and assassinate was a painful but easy task. But to actually cut dialogue and action...

Visualize a runner. The kind that wins marathons. No corpulence on this guy. No heart disease threatening to kill him before he finishes the race, no extra baggage weighing him down. Lean and fast. That's the story. A race from start to finish. Take only what is needed to win.

Is the hilarious scene where the guy gets his butt stuck in an armchair needed? Not to finish. Is the clever banter between hero and sidekick required? It doesn't make the story go any faster. Fiction does not exist on paper. It exists within the mind of the reader. Use just enough words to get the mind working. Don't let ego tell you otherwise.

The hardest past of parenting is discipline, and there's no harder discipline than murder. But I urge you to kill your children. Not all —some must die so the others can live. Those that do survive will be taking home trophies.

Damn... I should probably cut out that simile.

Liability and Responsibility

While I don't consider my books to be subversive, dangerous, or inciteful, I have noticed that I've written about some things that perhaps should have remained unwritten about.

In WHISKEY SOUR, I explain how to put fish hooks and needles into Halloween candy.

In BLOODY MARY, I explain how to beat a lie detector.

In RUSTY NAIL, I explain how it's possible to break out of prison.

And now, in DIRTY MARTINI, I go into detail about how to poison food products and make explosives.

On one hand, I want the books to be realistic. I write about things that interest me, and I think that these bits of 'forbidden' information make the story more compelling.

On the other hand, I'd be mortified if some psycho used my books as a blueprint for their own sick crimes.

I justify my forays into criminal explanations by rationalizing that:

1. The information is already available on the Internet, in books, in movies, etc.
2. Sickos are going to commit crimes anyway, no matter what the inspiration.
3. It's doubtful disturbed individuals are reading my books when there's a wealth of prurient material already out there to indulge in.

Ridley Pearson's wonderful book HARDFALL was about some terrorists who fly a plane into the White House, years before 9/11. Clancy had a similar concept in one of his books.

Did the terrorists use these books as blueprints? We may never know. But if they did, are the writers to blame?

There was a big lawsuit involving the HOW TO BE A HITMAN book from Paladin Press, when this was found among the items of an actual assassin. Paladin lost, and had to pay big bucks.

With DIRTY MARTINI, I'm considering putting a disclaimer at the back of the book, telling would-be sickos that if they tried some of the things mentioned, it wouldn't work out as I've described.

What do you think? In an age where you can get any type of information on the Internet, are there still some things that shouldn't be written about? Should writers self-censor?

44 comments

Deadlines

My fourth Jack Daniels book is due March 1st.

I've got about 15k left to write.

It usually takes me about a month to write a book. I began a little earlier than usual for this novel, because February is short a few days, and I had a conference and a few events that took up some of my time.

But I'm still behind schedule. This book required more research than previous books, and for the first time ever I actually got stuck (I needed to figure out how to commit an impossible crime, and then figure out how the police could thwart it.)

I've always been a last minute kind of guy. I'd do my homework on the bus going to school, the day it was due. I was still making edits on my final film project in college ten minutes before the festival ran it. When I give a dinner speech at a conference, I'm usually jotting down what I'll speak about during dessert.

My wife, a fountain of wisdom, patience, and beauty, casually suggested that perhaps I need to begin writing my books sooner than 40 days before they're due. I laughed at her.

"I do my best work at the last minute," I replied.

"You do all your work at the last minute," she countered.

I would have pursued the arguement, but —-hey —-I need to finish the damn book.

Which I will finish. It will be tight, but I'll burn the midnight oil and get it done. And according to aforementioned wife, who is reading the chapter a day I'm writing, it's my best book yet.

Which brings me to the topic of this blog entry.

How well do you work under pressure?

In the music biz, the second album traditionally sucks. The first was compiled over years of honing, rewriting, and reworking. The second has to be written and recorded in eight months.

Novels are the same. You have years to write your first book. Book #2 needs to be done within a year. And also within that year, you'll be doing a gazillion things for the first book, so you don't actually have an entire year.

The fact is, no matter when you begin your next book, you'll never have enough time, and you'll always feel the heat of the time-crunch. If I'd started six months ago, I can promise I'd still be in the very same situation I am now.

Can you flip your creativity on and off like a switch? Can you force the muse to appear when the pressure is on and the bills need to be paid and the deadline looms ever closer? And can you make sure the book is better than the previous one?

If so, you have a shot at succeeding in this biz.

If not, you may still succeed. But make sure you never sign multi-book contracts, be upfront with your agent and editor about how long it takes you to complete a novel, and don't bite off more than you can chew.

My goal today is 3500 words. That's about 15 pages. I know I can do it, and I will do it.

Can you?

53 comments

Writer's Block

I don't believe in muses.

Do plumbers need to get inspired? Do bartenders ever become blocked and unable to mix drinks? Can mechanical engineers only design a linkage when in the proper mindset?

I feel the same about writers.

Many disagree with me, including several peers of mine who have been blocked. They use words like *art* and *creativity* and *magic* while they mope around in a funk —-sometimes lasting for months —-until the magic magically returns.

I think they're crazy. Writing doesn't involve magic. It involves putting words down on paper, something most of us have been doing since we were five years old.

But surely creating a story from scratch requires more creativity and inspiration than painting a fence or hosting a talkshow?

Actually, writing a story requires exactly the same skills as hosting a talk show. And thinking that way is a helpful cure for writer's block.

Let's say you're Jerry Springer. You've got a topic like "Which of my Cousins Fathered my Baby?" Plenty of conflict inherent in that premise. As guests, you've got Holly, a cute 17-year-old fifth grade drop out and the mamma to be. Her cousin Elmer, a bad boy who races lawnmowers. Her cousin Zeke, who has loved Holly since puberty, but also has loved Holly's sister, Georgia. Let's also include Georgia on the show, a beautiful southern belle with an eating disorder, and the girl's mother, who is only eleven years older than Holly, and who has also slept with Elmer.

What is Jerry's job? He has to:

1. Make sure the premise is intriguing.
2. Make sure the guests have a chance to tell their sides of the story.
3. Stir up conflict to keep things interesting.
4. Try to come to some kind of resolution by the show's end.

Coincidentally, that's what writers need to do.

Jerry doesn't need to put words in the mouths of his guests, or put his hands on them to get them to attack each other.

He simply has to sit back and direct the action. And it works. Conflict ensues. Sparks fly. Secrets are revealed. Chairs are thrown.

Instead of thinking of yourself as a magician, waiting for inspiration to allow you the power to write a story, you should think of yourself as a director, watching the action, steering it into the directions you want it to go.

You aren't speaking for the characters. The characters are speaking for themselves. You aren't forcing the conflict. The conflict is happening all on its own.

The writer is simply the conduit for the story. Let the characters write it for you.

Jerry Springer isn't scripted. He has a few vague ideas of what he wants to see, and then runs with it.

Writing should be the same way. Don't worry about making it perfect. Don't fret over every single word. Let the characters speak for themselves, and let the story go wherever it wants to go.

Don't tie your own hands. Instead, ask your characters how they're feeling, what they want, and what they should do next.

If you relax and let things happen, you won't be blocked. In fact, you'll be excited and curious about where your story is heading.

And best of all, it's a helluva lot easier than plumbing.

24 comments

Your Own Personal Censor

How far is too far in writing?

I've read some pretty disturbing books. Horror writers Ed Lee and Jack Ketchum are known for not pulling punches, and their prose is often gag-inducing.

Bret Easton Ellis gained notoriety for American Psycho, and for good reason —it was revolting. Samuel Delaney almost destroyed his award-winning sci-fi career writing about the reprehensible anti-hero Hogg.

Books about racism (The Turner Diaries), illegal information (Anarchist's Cookbook, How to be a Hitman), and sadism (Justine, still as disturbing as it was a hundred years ago) push and then step over the boundaries of what is considered acceptable.

Yet there is something attractive about being a literary bad boy. About being able to shock using words.

Have you ever gone too far in your own writing? Is there a such thing as too far? What are things that shouldn't ever be written about? Are there any?

I'm bringing it up because the new issue of the wonderful online magazine Hardluck Stories is now available. The editor of this issue approached me, asking for a horrific crime story.

How horrific? I asked.

As horrific as you can make it.

So I gave him one.

I'm not a fan of purple prose, especially when describing blood and guts. So I tried to write a disturbing story without any description at all.

THE CONFESSION has no exposition, no speaker attribution, no description. It's all dialog.

But don't let that fool you. This isn't for the faint of heart. You've been warned.

Check it out for free at www.hardluckstories.com.

And then ask yourself —-how far would you take your own writing?

Added Disclaimer: I'm serious about the warning! This isn't like my other stuff. It's really ugly. If words have the power to offend you, don't read it!

77 comments

Wine Me, Dine Me, 69 Me

Jerry Peterson, over at **Tuesdays with Story**, challenged me to write a complete story in 69 words. They have a bunch of them posted on their site, including mine:

— — — — — — — — — — — — —

How long? Three days? Four?
No light. No water or food. The closet door is thick. Solid. He's banged on it until he bleeds.
This isn't punishment. It's murder.
He cries. No tears come out. Dehydration.
"Please open up." Voice hoarse, raw. "I promise I won't do it again. I'm sorry."
The small, precious reply:
"You haven't learned your lesson yet. Be brave. That's what you tell me, Daddy."

— — — — — — — — — — — — —

That took me about five minutes —-three to write, and two to edit down to 69.

Think it's easy? It's not. But it's a great excersise that makes you appreciate the value of every word —-something you should be doing with ALL of your longer work.

Post your 69 word epic here, and let me know how long it took. The best story gets a signed Advance Reading Copy of **RUSTY NAIL**.

Contest ends at 11:59pm on March 11, Central time.

Good luck!

89 comments

NaNoWriMo

Since you're a writer, you probably know that November is National Novel Writing Month, where thousands of authors, both newbie and pro, sign up at www.nanowrimo.org to try and write 50k words in 30 days.

Those familiar with me, or with this blog, know that I write pretty fast. In fact, I've written two books this year. The first, AFRAID, is a horror novel that will be coming out in January 2009 (more on that soon.) The second, FUZZY NAVEL, is book #5 in the Jack Daniels series, coming out in June 2008.

November is pretty busy for me. I've got to go to Delaware for a book festival, Wisconsin for Murder in Muskego, and Indiana for an ILF meeting. I also have two novellas due for anthologies that invited me, and one of them is 10k words.

So, naturally, I signed up for NaNoWriMo.

I have a specific reason for doing this. My contract with my publisher is complete when I turn in Jack #6 in March 2008. I'd like to also have Jack #7 done by that time. That way, if I don't get the offer I'm looking for, I'll have a complete manuscript to shop around. I believe a finished book is a better bargaining chip than a proposal or an outline.

Being between contracts is a scary time for a writer, and it can often last weeks or even months. So I'm going to write Jack #7, set it aside, and then in February write Jack #6, which my publisher is expecting.

I figure I have 24 free days to get 50,000 words done. I don't have an outline for this book, but I do have a pretty solid idea that should be fun to write.

And just to make it interesting, if I don't make my quota, I'll shave my head and post a video of it on YouTube.

Who says writing isn't exciting?

Watch this blog for bi-weekly progress reports.

22 comments

NaNoWriMo Day 6 - On Plotting

Okay, I'm a wee bit behind.

Because I was at the Delaware Book Festival from the 1st to the 4th, I didn't get started on the new Jack book until yesterday morning.

So far, I've got about 3200 words done —-about 13 pages. Not bad, but I'll need to step it up if I want to reach my 50k quota. Especially since I promised two author friends I'd read their current manuscripts, and next week I'll be in Wisconsin and Tennessee for four days, and I still have a 10k novella due, along with a short story collaboration that I'm working on with F. Paul Wilson, which has always been a dream of mine since I've been reading him since 1982 and I think he's a God so I don't want to screw it up.
It's going to be a busy month.

That said, in my free time I've been thinking a lot about the new novel, and even though I don't have an outline for it I've already got a pretty good idea of what I want it to be about. Which begs the question: What is plotting and how is it done?

I've talked with many authors, both newbie and pro, who have difficulties with plotting. Personally, I think it's the easiest part of writing. I believe the main goal of plotting is to make the reader want to know what happens next. To do that, there are some pretty simple tricks that anyone can master.

1. Give your character a goal. All narratives require a quest of some sort. It could be a quest to catch a killer, or get a boyfriend, or find self awareness, but in every case the story begins with the hero deciding upon the goal and beginning the quest.

2. Don't let your character reach her goal. The plot then comes down to making it difficult for the character, throwing obstacles in her way. Other characters with opposing goals, the environment, and turns of events can all conspire to make reaching the goal more difficult.

3. Use what you've got. If you're stuck, reread what you've already written. Chances are, your subconscious has already planted something in the manuscript that you can build upon. The car trouble alluded to in chapter 3 can become a huge problem in chapter 8. The sneeze in chapter 1 can become the flu in chapter 11. The argument in chapter 4 can become divorce papers in chapter 9.

4. Think about the worst thing that can happen. After you've written a character for a few dozen or hundred pages, and have gotten to know her like a family member, you're going to better understand her goals, fears, and motivations. Think about the most horrible thing that can happen to her, then make it happen.

5. Overcome the obstacles and reach the goal. That's it. You've written a narrative. Congrats.

If you're struggling to write what happens next, or you're stuck in the boring middle section of the book, go back and seed it with more goals and obstacles and foreshadowing. And try to avoid being obvious or overt. While all stories follow the narrative structure, good writers make the structure invisible.

Happy writing!

13 comments

NaNoWriMo Day 13 - On Speed

As expected, I've gotten very little writing done because I've been travelling. My three day trip last week went into five days because of car trouble. So here I am, at Day 13, with 3400 words.

I've got some catching up to do.

The most I've ever written in a day is 9,000 words, and I've had two day totals of about 15,000, so I know I can still reach the 50,000 goal and save my lovely curly locks from the trimmer.
I've always been able to write fast, and stay focused for long period of time. But I never stopped to ponder why. I certainly don't think I'm more talented, creative, inspired, or dedicated than any of my peers, pro or newbie. But I haven't met many writers who can crank out the words as quickly.

So before I get started on my novel this morning, I thought I'd write a few words about speed, endurance, and staying focused.

1. Sit Your Ass In The Chair

The first step is to actually sit at your desk, your Word Processing program open on your computer. Now be a good dog and STAY, getting up only to eat, hit the john, and attend to any bleeding children.

2. Limit Distractions

The biggest attention temptation for a writer is the Internet. Besides email, chat, and games, there's also the dreaded *research*, which begins at Google or Wikipedia and then, an hour later, devolves into you reading about something entirely unrelated to your book.

Phone calls, nonessential communication with family members, stretching your legs, or doing anything "to get the muse started" is time that should be spent writing.

3. Write

You shouldn't worry if it's crap. Give yourself permission to write crap. The goal is to get words on the page. Write them, even if they suck. Inspiration is bullshit. Writing is a job. How often does your 9 to 5 job inspire you? Yet you do it anyway. When working, the motivation is the paycheck. With Nanowrimo, the motivation is getting to 50k. Get there, even if you think you're producing garbage. You can always edit in December.

If you are stuck, staring at a blinking cursor and pulling out your hair, here are some tricks:

- Read what you wrote the day before. That can give you a launching point for getting into the next scene.
- Spice it up. Usually, being unable to decide what happens next means you don't have enough action or conflict. Give your hero more problems to deal with. I don't care what kind of book you're writing, you can always introduce more characters and plotlines to make things harder for your protagonist. When God gets bored with earth, he sends in a tsunami.

- Skip around. Much of getting stuck happens when you're pushing for something to happen, but you can't seem to get there. You know what I mean; the big scene that came to you fully-formed, but you haven't gotten to the point in the story yet. Who says you need to write in order? Do the scene you're itching to do —you can connect it to the rest of the book later.
- Free yourself. Often you get mired down in outlines, plans, details, and expectations, which can bring your story to a dead end with no hope of moving forward. Allow yourself to change your original plans. Narratives often go in places we didn't expect, and may not even like. Roll with it. Change things. Go in different directions, even if that means your book becomes something different.

4. Fight Fear With Action

Fifty thousand words in a month is a scary thing. It's easy to obsess about word count, worry that everything you've written is garbage, and spend so much time questioning your ability to finish that you're wasting valuable writing time. The best way to combat fear is with action. Every time you feel the need to doubt yourself, or check your word count, force yourself to finish the page. The doubts usually go away for a while. When the come back, be aware of them, and finish that page.

In short, less thinking, more writing.

Now if you'll excuse me, I have 46,600 words to write in 18 days, so I'm getting started...

26 comments

NaNoWriMo Day 19 - On Crap

So far this month I've written 26,000 words.

Unfortunately, only 10k of them have been the novel.

The other 16k have been a magazine article and two novellas for upcoming anthologies. I also managed to sneak in a few online interviews.

Am I worried I'll have to shave my curly locks?

A little. Assuming I won't get much done on Thanksgiving, that means I have ten days to write 40k words. That's 16 pages a day. It's doable, but won't be easy.

Which makes this pretty exciting. I'm guessing it will come down to the wire.

Setting goals and challenging yourself, both artistically and with deadlines, is part of being a writer. I think it's a fun part.

The book itself is going well. It's coming together nicely, albeit slowly. I just wrote my first ever sex scene for the series (which is on the kinky side —I think Barry Eisler will approve) and the plot is shaping up to be the most fun of all the Jack books.

Which brings me to the topic of this blog entry: Writing Crap.

It's important to give yourself permission to write crap. Writers write. They get words on the page. Spend too much time thinking, questioning, judging, dismissing, and second-guessing, and you'll never get anything finished.

However, you should NEVER settle for crap.

Though Cherry Bomb is my 6th Jack Daniels book, it's actually my 17th novel. I can say, with some certainty, that my first six novels were crap. Everything since then has, in my opinion, worked. And each book I write seems to come a little easier, involve a little less rewriting, to get it to the point where it works.

So what makes a book work?

It's hard to pinpoint why some novels work better than others. It's even harder to judge your own writing objectively. Obviously, there are craft issues you can be aware of, like narrative structure, rising action, character realism, linear progression, and pacing, among many others, but being aware of them and knowing if they're working in you book are two different things.

However, I believe there's something instinctive, something perhaps even intrinsic to the novel, which can tell the writer if it actually works.

We all have moments when the writing is flowing, the loose ends are all coming together, and we feel that this collection of words and sentences and scenes is coming together as a pleasing, cohesive whole.

Sometimes we're wrong. What works for us actually doesn't work for readers. But sometimes —and I think experience plays a part —we're right, and we can actually *feel* the process working instead of *worrying* if its working.

Now there have been intelligent, thoughtful posts all over the Internet this month, about the number of awful manuscripts that NaNoWriMo is going to unleash upon the world.

My friend Marcus Sakey, who is as meticulous with his writing craft as he is talented (which could be a knock, but in his case it's high praise) recently wrote this on The Outfit blog:

Look at it this way: would you participate in National House Building Month if you had to live in the result? Of course not, because a house takes care to build.

I agree. But I also believe if you've been building houses for years, and know what it takes to build a good house, that each one you built can be done better and faster.

Here's the thing though: You don't have to build a house in a month.

Maybe you just build the frame. Or the foundation. Or the living room. Or maybe you do build the house, but it is pretty shoddy. There is no law that says what you build you have to keep. You can change the house, fix it, add it it, make it better, before you move in.

My first six houses were lousy. Uninhabitable. But I learned from them. So when I built the seventh, I got an agent. And when I built the tenth, I got a book deal.

Don't spend your time worrying that your writing sucks. The writing will tell you that later. Or the world will.

You just have to get the words on the page, and trust yourself.

It gets easier the longer you do it.

And it should go without saying that when you do finish that book, don't assume it's ready to submit. Get feedback. Rewrite. Put it away for a month and attack it with fresh eyes.

Your first house may not sell. Your tenth might not either. But you will get better. And in this crazy business, that's all you have control over.

Keep at it. Set goals and reach them. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

Now if you'll excuse me, I'm going to turn off the Internet, take a handful of amphetamines, and bust my ass.

Happy Thanksgiving.

23 comments

NaNoWriMo Day 25 - On Goals

So did I make my 50k goal, or will I be shaving my head?

Sorry to disappoint, but I won't be doing any shaving. Because I cheated.

I did get 50k words. And they're 50k pretty good words.

But they're for two different stories.

Halfway into the Jack book, I launched into a side story and just rolled with it. This became its own novella. For those who read my novels, it's a Harry McGlade story. With zombies. Which is why, obviously, it can't be part of the Jack novel.

Anyway, because it's an odd length (20k words) it's going to be damn hard to sell. After I edit it, I think I'll look into one of those publishers who do overpriced limited edition hardcovers.

So I technically didn't write 50k of one novel, but I did do 50k with the same characters (Jack is in this too) so I'm going to compromise. Instead of cutting my hair, I'll cut my nails. There's enough crap on YouTube to bother videotaping it.

For those who want to cry foul and demand a head shaving, I encourage you to start one of those online petitions, like the one used to get Family Guy back on the air. Get 1000 people to sign it, and Marcus Sakey can shave my head in front of a live crowd at **Love is Murder** in February. If 1000 people really want to see me bald, who am I to argue?

That said, I enjoyed the pressure NaNoWriMo put on me, and I may do it again. In fact, I encourage all writers to try it, whether they end up with a novel, or part of a novel and a novella, or even a bunch of crap that will never see print.

That's because writing is about setting, and reaching, goals.

Stories don't write themselves. They take a considerable time commitment. Often that commitment is hard to justify. But writers, real writers, make writing a priority. They *make* the time and the effort.

This is a business about pushing yourself, because many times there's no one else pushing you. Unless you're lucky enough to have a deadline, the pressure is mostly self-induced. NaNoWriMo helps to put on some pressure. Pressure = words on a page. And that's what writers do. We write. Anything that helps us write is worth trying.

Speaking of goals, my anniversary is coming up. This is my 299th blog entry for A Newbie's Guide To Publishing. Over half a million people have visited this blog since it began in 2005. I'm grateful to each and every one of you for believing I have something to share with the writing community.

I'd like to make my 300th post something special, and since much of this blog is about setting and reaching goals, I'd like to open up my blog to my readers.

I want to hear what your goals are for 2008.

Whether you're a pro or a newbie, a long time reader or a recent visitor, please email me at haknort@comcast.net and tell me:

1. Your Goals for 2008.

2. How you will reach these goals.

If you're a lurker, but never comment, this is the perfect time to introduce yourself. If you're a long time reader, I ask you to help me spread the word. We're all part of the same community. We all have goals. Let's share them and inspire each other.

And please provide your answers email here, not in the comments section here. I'll put all of your goals (and my goals) in my 300th post in week or so.

Thanks again for reading.

13 comments

So You Wanna Write About Handguns

I'm not a gun expert. But I've fired a few and have learned some things about them. Here's a smattering of definitions, explanations, and notes:

- Guns are loud. Even little ones. Louder than firecrackers. If you don't have ear protection, it seriously hurts.
- *Silencers* aren't real. Nothing can silence a bullet. There are things called *suppressors*, which can be used to muffle the sound of a bullet firing. It's still as loud as a hand clap. Suppressors are illegal for public citizens. Suppressors work on semi-autos and rifles, but not revolvers or shotguns.
- A *revolver* is an old West/Dirty Harry type of gun. It generally holds five or six bullets in a cylinder. Suppressors don't work on revolvers because the cylinder is open to the air, so the noise isn't trapped.
- *Semi-automatics* are sometimes called autos, even though they aren't true automatics —those are machine guns where holding the trigger will fire multiple times. Semi-autos are also known as auto-loaders, because when a bullet is fired, the brass cartridge is ejected and the next bullet is forced into the chamber. Instead of a center rotating cylinder, they have a clip that goes into the grip.
- A *clip* is not a *magazine*. A clip has a spring inside that forces bullets into the chamber, behind the hammer, as the gun is fired. A magazine simply holds bullets.
- *Full metal jacket* means the slug is encased in metal and doesn't expand when it hits the target. Slugs normally expand into a mushroom shape when they hit something. This flattening out means the bullet stops within a target, transferring the maximum amount of energy. FMJ go through targets. *Hollow points* fragment within the target, causing lots of damage.
- *Cocked and locked* is a term that means there's a bullet in the chamber, the hammer is cocked (pulled back) and the safety is on. The gun won't fire like this. But if you flick off the safety, you're ready to shoot.
- *Double action* weapons don't need to be cocked each time they are fired —pulling the trigger will set up the next bullet to be fired and also cock the hammer back. *Single action* weapons need to be cocked each time a bullet is fired —there is no automatic recocking.
- *Cocking* a handgun involves chambering a round in a semi-auto, and/or pulling the hammer back. When this is done, the trigger moves back, making for an easier and shorter trigger pull.
- *Caliber* refers to how wide the barrel is, and what bullets it will fire. A .22 is a very small bullet (point twenty-two inches wide.) The slug is about the size of a BB (22LR is slightly longer.) The only part that fires is the top part of the bullet. The bottom part, called the cartridge (often called brass) holds the charge. This brass can be packed with different amounts of grain for faster or slower velocity. Pull the trigger, the hammer releases on a spring, smacks into the back of the bullet (center fire for most handguns) which ignites the powder, causing it to explode and expel the slug.
- A *bullet* consists of a slug and a cartridge. The slug is what fires. The cartidge is what stays in the gun, or is ejected. If you've ever seen a movie where the slow-motion bullet looks like a bullet that just came out of the box, it's wrong —-only the top part of the bullet is the projectile.
- *Rifling* is a corkscrew pattern inside the barrel. When the bullet is fired, this causes it to spin, and become more stable and accurate.
- Semi-automatics can jam. If a gun isn't clean, it can jam a lot. Jamming occurs when the cartridge isn't ejected properly after firing, or if the next bullet doesn't load properly. Either the empty casing, or the new bullet, gets caught in the eject port. This can be cleared by pulling back the slide.

- Loading clips is time consuming and hard on the fingers. The spring inside a clip is powerful, and it takes some force and some time to get the bullets in there. For example, a nine-year-old probably wouldn't have strong enough fingers. You can buy speed loaders which pull back the spring, making it easier and faster, but even then, reloading a 13 round clip will take at least 30 seconds to a minute.
- Guns and bullets are heavy. Sticking a 9mm in your front pocket is not a smart idea for many reasons, one of which is it will pull down your pants.
- Glocks don't have hammers, or thumb safeties. They have an extra lever on the trigger that needs to be pressed before they fire.
- Someone unfamiliar with semi-autos wouldn't be able to fire one, at least not quickly. If there's no bullet in the chamber, pulling the trigger will have no effect. The first round needs to be chambered by pulling back the slide. Depending on the gun, the safety may need to be switched off, or the hammer may need to be pulled back if there's a round already chambered.
- Aiming isn't easy. It isn't unreasonable that a person firing a gun for the first time could miss a target from only fifteen feet away, or closer.
- Cordite smells like firecrackers.
- Dehorning a gun means it has all of the sharp edges taken off, so it doesn't catch on clothing or the holster.
- Bluing, chroming, and Parkerizing are finishes that protect against rust.
- Teflon coated, or cop-killer bullets, aren't real. Or, more precisely, Teflon isn't what makes bullets penetrate armor and bullet proof vests. Bullets that can do that are armor piercing bullets, made out of harder metals. Teflon simply reduces the wear and tear on a gun.
- A *Saturday Night Special* is any cheap gun, usually used to commit crimes.
- A *zip gun* is a homemade gun, which usually fires a single shot. All a person needs is a pipe and a striking mechanism to shoot a bullet.
- Holding a gun gangsta style, sideways, is a really easy way to miss a target.
- Always treat every gun you encounter as loaded.

32 comments

Have a Safe and Secure Holiday Season

A recent computer problem made me re-evaluate the need to back up my writing.

I have a writing friend who is so paranoid about losing data that he ftps every chapter to offshore accounts (at least, that's how I imagine it.)

I've lost writing before, and there are few things as painful in life. Here are some tricks and tips and products that will ensure you never have to feel that particular pain.

PRINT - It never hurts to keep a paper copy. If you lose the file, you can always recover the story with OCD software like Abbyy Finereader.

ZIP - Bulky zip drives have lost favor to their keychain flash drive counterparts, which can hold up to a gig on a device the size of a pencil. Just stick it in the USB port and drag 'n drop. (a novel, even a long one (150k), doesn't run more than 1 or 2 mbs, so you can back-up every bit of text on your computer and still have room to spare.

APC - The big name in batteries. This is a combo surge protector/battery back-up that prevents you from losing data during a power outage. Get one.

EMAIL - Having an extra email account, and emailing doc attachments to yourself, can't hurt.

DVD - A DVD can hold 4.7 gigs of data. They cost about 30 cents each, and a DVD burner can be picked up for under 50 bucks. CDRs are even cheaper, and hold 700mb.

FTP - If you have a website, you have a storage locker available in cyberspace under your name. Using an FTP program can allow you to save your writing on your home page (and don't worry, no one can read it there —it's hidden unless you link directly to it.)

OE BACKUP - There are a few tools available for saving your email (I use one for Outlook Express.) Find a program that fits your needs, and then save your email along with your writing. I go through my deleted and sent mail folders several times a day, trying to figure out who said what and when.

FIRE SAFE - This isn't a computer attachement. It is what it is — a fire safe. Keep your flash drive and DVDs in the safe, in case your house burns down. Put them in a plastic bag first, to protect them from flooding. Paranoid? Talk to anyone who has lost their home to fire or flood. It doesn't hurt to also keep some copies in the car, or at Mom's house.

FILES - NEVER save just one file. I always save in different formats (wpd, doc, rtf, txt) in different places on my computer (C: drive, Desktop, My Documents) under different names.

SECOND HARD DRIVE - Also cheap, you can install an extra hard drive in your computer for less than fifty bucks. It's like having two computers in one case.

SECOND COMPUTER - Networking is a pain to set up, but using the Shared Documents folder can be a lifesaver, and is still the fastest way to transfer data.

NORTON ANTI-VIRUS - Still the leading trojan slayer. MacAfee is also big, as is Panda. Whatever you use (and you must use something,) make sure it offers updates.

Computer running slow? AdAware and Spybot are free tools (available at www.pcworld.com) that clean your computer of spyware, malware, and tracking software. You can also DEFRAGMENT your hard drive, run a DISK CHECK for errors, and use SYSTEM RESTORE if none of that works.

If anyone has any other tips for saving data, lemme know and I'll post them.

21 comments

How Not To Start A Story

In the spirit of full disclosure, I'm in a bad mood. For the past few days I've been wading through hundreds of short stories. I'm a paid judge for a big contest, and my verdicts are due.

This bad mood has been brought about by seeing the same story mistakes, over and over and over and OVER AND OVER...

So, for the benefit of the newbie writing world, and to save me future pain if I ever judge a contest again, please take the following to heart:

DO NOT START A STORY WITH WEATHER
Yes, you can work weather into the scene. But I don't care that it was sixty-five degrees on a spring morning, and if you make that your first sentence you're going to remain unpublished.

DO NOT START A STORY WITH CHARACTER DESCRIPTION
Your protag may be named Bob McTestes, and he was born in Sunndydale, Ohio in 1967, but you need to work that into the body of the story and not make it the first sentence. Better yet, don't work it in anywhere.

DO NOT START A STORY BY ADDRESSING THE READER
"You'll never believe what happened on July 2, 1943." You're right. I won't believe it, because I just stopped reading.

DO NOT START A STORY WITH PREMONITION
"Phil Assmaster didn't know he was going to die that day." But Joe Konrath knows you're not going to win this contest.

DO NOT START A STORY WITH THE PROTAG WAKING UP
Frankly, it shocked me how many stories began like this. More so than any other way I'm warning against. Opening your eyes because you had a bad dream or heard a strange noise is a quick way to put the reader to sleep.

DO NOT START A STORY WITH CLICHES
Once upon a time. A long time ago. This is a true story. Ugh. Next time, save me the trouble and put the story in your own recycle bin.

DO NOT START A STORY WITH SETTING DESCRIPTION
"Moronville, Ohio was a town of 8371 people originally founded in 1872 by Quakers." Hopefully, one of those Quakers has a gun and will shoot me.

DO NOT START A STORY WITH TELLING
"Josh felt terrible." Really? How am I supposed to picture that? Maybe I picture Josh's stomach aching, his head throbbing, and the hole where his heart is supposed to be. If I'm picturing that, perhaps you should have as well and written it that way.

DO NOT START A STORY WITH DESCRIPTION
I don't care if you're describing a person, place, thing, era, or whatever. I want to read about conflict, not helper words.

DO NOT USE HELPER WORDS
Force yourself to pare away every adverb, and half your adjectives. Also kill any speaker attribution other than "said" and "asked."

DO NOT START A STORY WITH A PROLOGUE
Your short story doesn't need a prologue. Your novel probably doesn't either.

DO NOT USE EXCLAMATION POINTS!
Especially a bunch of them!!!!!!!

DO NOT USE THE SAME FARUQING WORD TWICE IN THE SAME FARUQING PARAGRAPH
Get the faruquing point?

GRAMMER AND SPELING SHOULD BE PREFECT
If you don't care, why should I? Ditto annoying dialect spelling. Y'all get a-ight wit dat sheet, 'kay?

And finally:

DO NOT MAKE YOUR MAIN CHARACTER AN ANIMAL
Ever.

Are there exceptions to these rules? Of course. There are always exceptions. But I didn't see any in the 2000+ stories I had to endure.

Also, for the love of all that is good, use 12 point Arial, Courier, or Times New Roman, double space the text, one inch margins, and indent each paragraph but don't add extra spaces in between them.

Rant over. Ignore at your own peril. Now I'm going to go have some bourbon and scour my eyes and brain with steel wool...

76 comments

Just Plotting Along

Whenever I teach I'm asked by newbies how to write that boring middle section of the book, the part between the electrifying opening and the dramatic conclusion.

"You mean the plot?" I always reply.

Sayings and axioms abound about plotting, and I'll paraphrase a few here. Elmore Leonard said the famous "Don't write the parts people skip."

Other oft-heard quotes are, "Write a great beginning and a great ending and string them as close together as possible" and "Chase your characters up a tree, then throw rocks at them."

Ellery Queen and Raymond Chandler are credited with variations on "When things get boring toward the middle, kill somebody" and "When it slows down have two men burst into the room with guns."

All of these sort of touch on the central idea of plotting, namely, conflict. But none are really helpful except in the most general sense.

So here's what I do.

1. Give the characters at least two goals. A story goal, and a personal goal.

In my Jack Daniels series, the story goal is for Jack to catch the bad guy. Her personal goals are fixing her relationships and getting a good night's sleep.

There's something inherent in the human brain that desires order and completion. We want to fit all the puzzle pieces together and live happily ever after. So the first step on this journey is deciding where to go. This is the first stitch on the way to completing the quilt, and it gets the reader's attention and makes them subconsciously want to see it through to the satisfying conclusion.

2. Don't reveal everything at once.

It's natural, once you have a great idea, to want to spill everything immediately. But suspense, and reader interest, is piqued by the opposite —only give a little at a time. Ask questions, but don't answer them until later.

Questions keep the pages turning. The obvious question, "What happens next?" is what both your characters and your readers should be thinking.

In my book Afraid, both the reader and the main characters have no idea what is attacking the town until the second act; all they get are glimpses and pieces. Figuring things out is a lot more satisfying than being spoon fed.

3. Prevent the characters from reaching their goals.

The boring middle part of the book shouldn't be boring at all. This is the part where the author really gets to antagonize his main characters, heaping more and more conflict on them.

What is the absolute worst thing that can happen to your character? Make it happen. What will be impossible for them to overcome? Do it.

Along with being genetically wired to desire completion and order, we also like there to be a struggle before all is well. Adversity, conflict, and tragedy allow for admirable human attributes such as courage, love, and perseverance to blossom. We like winners, especially underdog winners. So heap on the abuse.

4. Subtext is subtext.

Sure, you may have an important theme to the work. Yes, you may love the written word and want to be as eloquent as possible. Of course you want to explore human nature, make the reader think about deep issues, and create realistic characters with complex motivations.

But don't do any of that at the expense of the story, dammit.

A story, in its purest form, is: "Here's a mess, clean it up."

We're storytellers. Not charactertellers. Not themetellers. Not poets. The goal of a story is to present a problem, then solve the problem.

Are there exceptions? Sure.

But don't base your career on an exception.

We've been a species of storytellers as long as we've had a written history, and probably longer. The Epic of Gilgamesh is over 5000 years old, but the basic formula still remains the same.

Here's a mess, clean it up.

But Joe, you want me to follow a formula? Aren't formulas cliche and derivative and the work of hacks?

Not if you do a good job.

My wife hates going to the movies with me, because I always whisper to her what is going to happen next. It's not that the movies are the work of hacks. It's just that the more you understand about the storytelling process, the better you can predict it.

Of course, once you're able to predict it, you can do the unpredictable.

This isn't about muses or inspiration or magic or creativity. It's more like architecture than art. Yes, you can be dynamic and expressive and imaginative, but there are still rules.

Learn the rules.

31 comments

Anatomy of a Horror Scene

I've annotated an early scene from the book with numbers that lead to footnotes at the bottom of the page. After reading the excerpt, you can check out the associated notes to learn why I did what I did, sort of like a DVD commentary.

The set-up is simple; a boy alone in his house at night...

— — — — — — — — — —-

Duncan Stauffer awoke to the sound of Woof barking. Woof was supposed to be a beagle, but Duncan had a lot of dog books and decided that Woof looked more like a basset hound. Woof was pudgy, with stubby legs and floppy ears and sad red eyes. It was funny because even though his eyes were sad, Woof played all the time. All the time. Duncan wondered how he could be so fat, since he ran around all day.[1]

Woof barked again, and Duncan sat up. The dog normally slept on Duncans bed, sprawled out on his back with his legs in the air. He only left to get a drink of water, let himself out through the doggy door to poop (Mom called it doing his dirty business), or greet Mom when she came home from the diner.

Duncan looked over at his SpongeBob digital clock next to the bed, but it wasn't on for some reason. Instead he checked his Dads watch, which he wore all the time since Mom had the links removed so it could fit.

The watch told him it was twelve forty-three.

Woof barked once more, a deep, loud bark that sounded exactly like his name, which was the reason Duncan named him Woof. But this wasn't the welcome home bark that Woof used when Mom came home. This was Woofs warning bark, the one he used for his fiercest enemies, like the squirrel who had a nest in the maple tree out front, or the Johnson's gray cat, who liked to hiss at Woof and scare him.[2]
"Woof! Come here, boy!"

Duncan waited. Normally, Woof came running when Duncan called, jumping on him and bathing his face with a tongue that was longer than Duncan's foot.

But Woof didn't come.

"Mom! Duncan called. You home?"

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[1] This is our introduction to Duncan and his point of view. It begins with Duncan jarred from his sleep by his dog, Woof, who is key to the scene. Prior to this scene, the reader knows it is night time, and his mother isn't home.
[2] While thinking in Duncan's voice, I'm establishing some things in rapid succession. Duncan's mom should be home, Woof normally doesn't bark, and Duncan doesn't have a father.

No one answered.[3]

Duncan didn't mind being by himself while Mom worked late. He was ten years old, which was practically an adult. His mom used to insist that he have a babysitter, and the one she usually got was Mrs. Teller, who was all bent over because she was so old and sometimes she smelled like pee. Duncan liked her okay, but she made him go to bed early, and wouldn't let him watch his favorite shows on TV like South Park because they said bad words, and she always wanted to talk about her husband who died years ago.

Duncan didn't like to talk about death.

After a long session with Dr. Walker, the therapist convinced Mom that Duncan was mature enough to stay home alone, if that's what Duncan wanted. Which he did. Duncan knew what to do in the case of any emergency. He'd taken the Stranger Danger class in school. He had three planned escape routes if there was a fire. He knew not to let anyone in the house, and how to call 911, and to never cook on the stove or use the fireplace or take a bath while home alone. He thought Mom was being a little crazy about the bath thing, like Duncan would fall asleep in the tub and drown. But he listened to Mom anyway, and she trusted him, and for the three months he'd been without a babysitter it had worked out fine. Duncan hadn't gotten scared once.

Until now.[4]

"Woof!" Duncan yelled again.

Woof didn't come.

It was possible his dog had gone outside, to do his dirty business. Or maybe he saw the Johnson's cat and went to chase him, even though the cat scared Woof a lot.

Or maybe something got him.

Duncan would never admit it to anyone, not even his best friend Jerry Halprin, but he sometimes believed monsters were real. He wasn't scared of monsters, exactly. He loved watching monster movies, and reading R.L. Stine books with monsters in them, but deep down he thought maybe monsters really did exist.

He didn't tell this to Dr. Walker, but when they had the car accident, and Mom thought Duncan was unconscious in the back seat, he wasn't really unconscious. He saw what happened to Dad, how bloody he was. For weeks afterwards, Duncan had horrible nightmares about monsters, biting and clawing and ripping up him and Mom, making them bleed and die. Since he got Woof, most of the nightmares had gone away.

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[3] The reader, aware of what is happening elsewhere in the book, knows Duncan is probably in trouble, but doesn't know what form the trouble is going to take.

[4] Backstory on Duncan, establishing he's a smart, responsible kid who had some sort of tragedy in his past. It also introduces Mrs. Teller, who comes into the book later. Duncan isn't scared yet, because he doesn't know what the reader knows.

But sitting in his bed, holding his breath and waiting for his dog to come, Duncan wondered if maybe a monster got Woof.[5]

Then he heard it; the jingle of metal tags from Woof's dog collar, just down the hallway.

"Woof!" he yelled, happily. He tucked his legs under his butt so when Woof hopped on the bed he wouldn't step on them, and waited in the dark for his dog to come.

But Woof didn't come.

Duncan listened hard, then called Woof's name again. He heard jingling, in the hall.

"Come on, Woof," Duncan urged.

The jingling got a little closer, then stopped. What was wrong with that dog?[6]
"Speak, Woof!"

Woof, who didn't really need to be told to speak because he spoke all the time, still loved to follow that command because he usually got a treat afterward. But Woof stayed quiet. Duncan wondered if he was maybe hurt, which is why he stopped barking.[7]

Duncan reached over to the light switch on the wall behind him. He flipped it up. It didn't do anything. He tried flicking it up and down a few times, but his bedroom light didn't come on. The electricity must be out, Duncan thought. Or maybe a monster stole the light bulb.[8]

"Woof!" Duncan said it hard, the way Mom did when Woof did his dirty business on the kitchen floor.

Woof's collar jingled, and Duncan heard him pant. But the dog stayed in the hallway. Did Woof want him to come there for some reason? Or was he afraid of something in the bedroom?

Duncan peeled back the covers and climbed out of bed. The house was warm but he shivered anyway. Mom made him wear pajamas when she was home, but on the nights she worked Duncan liked to sleep in his underwear. He wished he had his pajamas on now. Being almost naked made him feel small and alone.[9]

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[5] Now the reader knows the tragedy, and Duncan is starting to get scared.
[6] The jingling collar is a device that's familiar to Duncan, and puts him at easy. But the jingling soon becomes sinister, because Woof isn't coming.
[7] Woof isn't acting the way he should, and now Duncan expresses concern for his dog, rather than himself. Selflessness is a trait of heroes. But at the same time, the reader doesn't want Duncan to go look for his dog, knowing it isn't going to end well.
[8] More problems with common, everyday things people take for granted. Woof normally comes when he calls. Lights usually turn on. But things aren't normal, and Duncan is now becoming frightened.
[9] The hero has been called to action, and the reader hopefully wishes he would just get the hell out of there. More on the jingling motif, now with panting as well.

The room was too dark to see, and Duncan walked by memory, heading for the doorway to the hall, hands out in front of him like a zombie to stop him from bumping into walls. After some groping he found the door and stopped before walking through.

Woof's collar jingled, only a few feet in front of him. The panting got louder.

"Whats the matter, boy?"

Duncan knelt down and held out his hands, waiting for the dog to approach. When Woof didn't, Duncan felt goosebumps break out all over. He knew something was wrong, really wrong. Maybe Mom was right about leaving him home all alone. Maybe something bad happened to Woof, and Duncan wouldn't be able to help him because he was just a kid.[10]

Duncan stood up and reached for the hall light switch, but it didn't go on. So he pressed the button on his Dads watch and the blue bezel light came on, which was bright enough for him to see the man standing in the hallway, jingling Woofs collar and panting.[11]

###

Fear, like humor, is subjective, so this scene may not have scared you. But it was deliberately written to do so.

Duncan already has reader sympathy because we've met his mother, who is also in trouble. He's a child, he has a dog, and he seems like a good kid —all done on purpose to make him likable. So we don't want to see anything bad happen to him.

The cadence of Duncan's interior monologue is specifically patterned after my son's, to make him sound like a child.

I begin the scene with him being woken up. Waking up is never pleasant. Being jarred awake by something out of the ordinary, with Mom not home, is starting in the middle of the action.

I used mundane things going wrong —both the sound cues of the dog collar and the clock and lights being out —to increase both Duncan's and the reader's anxiety. Both want to know where Woof is, why he was barking and now isn't, why he won't respond. Presenting this conflict without revealing the answer right away makes the reader wonder what is going on, and keep reading to find out.

The backstory, which touches on the tragedy Duncan faced and his fight to grow past it, make the stakes even higher for the poor kid.

Then, when he finally goes to investigate, BAM! The reveal. And this reveal is the worst possible outcome for Duncan, having his dog gone and a weirdo toying with him.

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[10] Duncan's fear reaches its peak, his anxieties replace his confidence, and he recognizes his true limitations, even though earlier he believed he could handle anything.
[11] Here's the shocker. It isn't his dog panting and jingling his collar. It's a strange man in his house.

Having someone break into your house to hurt or kill you is bad. Having someone tease you first is really bad.

It's even worse for the reader, because the previous scenes have featured a lot of death and mayhem. Even this early in the story (page 48) I've already killed off a sympathetic character, so all bets are off when it comes to my characters' safety.

At the end of the scene, I skip to another POV. AFRAID doesn't have chapters; it quickly bounces from one character in jeopardy to the next. The reason behind this is to not give the reader any chance to put the book down. Each scene ends on a cliffhanger, the stakes getting higher and higher.

Obviously, I can't accurately judge my own work, because I'm biased. I'll leave it up to the readers to decide if AFRAID is scary or not. If you'd like to hear what other people are saying, or read a much longer excerpt for free, please visit my website at www.JackKilborn.com.

Pleasant dreams...

Collaboration

If you've never co-authored fiction before, you're missing out on a great experience. It's one of the most enjoyable forms of writing, while also being one of the quickest. Besides these benefits, collaboration offers writers the opportunity to learn a lot, increase their fan bases, and even make a few bucks.

Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child, who collaborate on their Pendergast thrillers, are gigantic bestsellers. Stephen King worked on two books with Peter Straub. Famous authors Ellery Queen, PJ Parrish, Charles Todd, PJ Tracy, and CS Graham are actually all duos sharing one name.

Of course, like all good writing, collaboration has certain rules that should be followed if you want to be successful. It also requires a unique set of skills that might not come naturally.

Should You Collaborate?

It's easy to see the surface benefits of collaboration by using simple math. Two heads are better than one. Two people can write a story in half the time. Two sets of eyes can spot more mistakes, and come up with more solutions.

I recently worked on a novella with writer Blake Crouch, author of the upcoming thriller Abandon. We were both between novels, and thought it would be fun to team up on something, especially since our styles and subject matter are so similar.

Crouch sez: *Co-writing makes you use writing muscles that rarely get flexed, and is way easier than doing it by yourself.*

Our joint effort was both easy and fast. We knocked out 9000 words in a single day, trading emails back and forth, and had a ball doing it. I can't remember the last time, if ever, I wrote so much so quickly.

New York Times bestseller Kristy Montee counts on her co-writer sibling to get around the dreaded writer's block. She's penned nine thrillers with her sister Kelly under the name PJ Parrish, the latest of which is *South of Hell*.

Montee sez: *"You can always count on the other brain to rescue you. We sometimes send each other scenes with notes attached that say: I AM LOST, FINISH THIS!"*

We all have dry spells. But when you're collaborating, they don't slow you down. It makes writing less daunting. In fact, you might find that co-writing can produce something greater than the sum of the parts.

Michelle Pillow, who has authored four romances with Mandy M. Roth, including the racy *Red Light Specialists*, believes that co-writers can complement each other. All writers have strengths and weaknesses, but teaming up with the right person means only the strengths will see print. Pillow enjoys collaborating for the extra benefits as well.

Pillow sez: *"When you join forces, you have the potential of drawing in their reader to your books, and vice-versa."*

A savvy marketer, Pillow knows that two people can do twice the promotional work, which potentially leads to more publicity.

I recently had the chance to collaborate on a novella with thriller writer Henry Perez, featuring my series character, Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels, and his character, Chicago reporter Alex Chapa, from his upcoming book *Killing Red*. This was for the charity anthology *Missing*, edited by Amy Alessio. Besides the fan crossover benefits, we had a lot of fun working together. It was also a terrific learning experience.

Perez sez: "It gave me the opportunity to work with a storyteller who comes at the process from a different angle. That pushed me in the same way a talented teammate can bring out the best in those around him."

Our story allowed me to think outside of the box and see my character in a different light. Since I created Lt. Jack Daniels six books ago in the novel *Whiskey Sour*, I'd been her only writer. But several times during our story, *Floaters*, Perez wrote for my characters, and I wrote for his. It's a terrific learning experience to write using the style, and mindset, of another author.

How to Pick a Collaborator

I collaborated with Jeff Strand on the novella *Suckers* for Delirium Books.

Strand sez: *"You need somebody who shares the same overall vision for the project."*

Jeff and I worked well together because we not only shared the same vision, but we had writing styles that complimented each other. Strand's books range from the incredibly scary, like his upcoming horrific thriller *Pressure*, to the gruesomely hilarious, as evidenced by his horror comedy *Benjamin's Parasite*. Since my Jack Daniels books combine terror and comedy, and I since I recently did a straight horror novel called *Afraid* under my pen name, Jack Kilborn, Strand was an obvious choice to work with.

When you collaborate, you really do need to be on the same page, figuratively, and often literally. Where do you find such a person? It should be someone you already know. People in your writing group, or writing peers that you've befriended and whose work you admire, are the obvious choices. Friendship is important, because things can get a bit rocky.

Before You Start Writing

If you've made the decision to collaborate, you've probably already done some initial brainstorming about the project. Besides knowing the type of story you intend to write, you and your collaborator need to set some ground rules. These include:

- Outlining. Will you use one? Who will write it? How much can each of you veer from it?
- Division of Labor. Who is going to write which scenes? How long is each scene, and the story, going to be?
- Editing. How much leeway do you each have to rewrite the other's words?
- Head-butting. How will you handle any potential disagreements while writing the story?

- Credit. Unless one of you is a bestseller or a celebrity, author credit is alphabetical. You can make other arrangements, but be clear at the onset.
- Rights. Again, unless previously arranged, you both own the story that you co-write. That means neither of you can sell it without having the permission of your collaborator. Any publishing contract will require both of your signatures.
- Exchanges. Will you both write scenes at the same time? Will you go first, then send it to your co-writer, who will then add on to that and send it back?
- Submission. You shouldn't begin writing any work of fiction without having an audience and a publisher in mind. Can you both agree on where you will send your opus once it's finished?

Should One Writer Lead?

F. Paul Wilson, author of the *Repairman Jack* thrillers and the grandfather of Urban Fantasy, believes that longer work requires someone to take charge of the story. He's co-written three novels, two with Matthew Costello and one with Stephen Spruill, and one short story, with me.

Wilson sez: "Of any two collaborators, one will have a stronger vision or care more about the project than the other. That person should be the captain."

Wilson isn't talking about a Bligh-Christian relationship, but rather, "someone to keep on course during the inevitable storms and becalming along the way."

Whether you chose to wing it, or have one writer take the helm, should be settled before a single word is written. Know the division of authority beforehand, or risk mutiny.

How Do We Write It Together?

In a perfect world, you could rent a bungalow in the Florida Keys with your collaborator, and pen your opus in the same room, discussing the story every step of the way.

But there are cheaper, and equally effective, alternatives.

- ✓ **Using Email** – This is the obvious choice. You decide who is going to write which sections, and then send them back and forth, either as attached documents, or embedded in the email itself. But there are actually faster options.
- ✓ **Text Messages** – My collaboration with Blake Crouch was based on a fun experiment. Since we both write novels that contain serial killers, we each wrote one scene separately. Mine had a crazy driver who murdered hitchhikers, Crouch's had a crazy hitchhiker who slaughtered the people who picked her up. Without showing each other our first scenes, we wrote the third scene together, beginning with my character picking up his character.

We began this via email, going back-and-forth, writing a few hundred words at a time. It became a game of literary chess; whose character would triumph? But I had an event to attend, tearing me away from the computer, so I texted my last few sections to Blake using my cell phone.

Texting, and instant messaging on your computer (it's free if you have a Facebook account) are also ways to ask questions of your co-writer that are more immediate than email.

Can't imagine writing a book using texting? It's already a craze in Japan. In 2007, text novels, called keitai shousetsu, accounted for half of the nation's bestselling books.

- ✓ **Using Online Software –** Jane Freidman has an excellent article on the Writer's Digest Blog about using online programs to collaborate. Tools such as Adobe Buzzword and Google Documents allow you and a collaborator to make changes to the same story, and also offer options to export, email, and publish the document in HTML. Since the story is online, and not on your hard drive, it also gives you the opportunity to write and edit while away from your personal computer.
- ✓ **Online Chat –** If you Google the word "chat" you'll find thousands of public places online that allow for free text chat. AIM is undoubtedly the most popular private chat client, but you can find more advanced options. At ooVoo.com, you and your collaborator can download text chat software for free. It also comes with video and audio chatting, and has the ability to record the conversations. You can experiment writing a story in real-time, make changes on the fly, and later cut and paste it into your favorite word processor for editing, or use voice-recognition software to get a text version of the audio file.

Co-Writing Survival Tips

I mentioned earlier the importance of only collaborating with writers who you have a good relationship with and admiration for. That's because there will be conflicts.

Like all of your fiction, your story is your baby. But when you have a co-writer, you're no longer a single parent. If the two of you don't have a similar outlook, and the same strategy for reaching the same goals, you're going to have one undisciplined, unruly kid on your hands.

Montee sez: *"There isn't room for ego in collaboration. You can't get hung up on fighting for 'your' words or ideas. We think of there being a third person in our partnership—the book. And the book always wins."*

It's essential that you communicate with your co-writer before, during, and after the process, and that you're upfront and honest. Tantrums, hurt feelings, and fights can be kept to a minimum if neither of you take anything personally. Writing is a business. Be businesslike.

You should also be prepared to lose a few battles.

Strand sez: *"It can be tough to concede when you think your approach is the correct one. But if there's mutual respect and you've both shared your reasoning and you still disagree, sometimes you'll just have to say, 'Okay, we'll do it your way.'"*

F. Paul Wilson agrees with the diplomatic approach: *"With Steve and Matt, we had an agreement, that if you can express something more clearly than I did, if you've got a better turn of phrase, go for it."*

Keep in mind that in this electronic age, it's possible to have many drafts of a project, and relatively simple to revert back to earlier versions. Many word processing programs even allow you to keep track of changes. If your partner cuts something that you love, you can always resurrect it for another story.

In my four collaborations, the few disagreements we had were dealt with quickly and painlessly. Much more memorable to me was how enjoyable co-writing was, how much I was able to learn, and how all of my preconceptions about the process turned out to be correct. Two heads *are* better than one, a story takes half the time, and the editing process is much smoother with two sets of eyes.

But collaboration turned out to be even more fun than I'd anticipated. I eagerly awaited getting the next section of a work-in-progress from my co-writer, and I loved hearing their responses and reading their additions to my sections. I've been doing this professional writer thing since 2003, and deadlines, rewritings, editors, galley corrections, self-promotion, and the many other professional trappings made me forget how much joy can be had in creativity. Having a partner in crime made me remember why I love writing so much.

Perez says: *"Have fun with the process. Most of us create in solitude, sometimes uncertain whether our work is any good until we've finished, and perhaps not even then. A co-writer can serve as a sounding board, a confidant, and a valuable critic."*

If done correctly, collaboration can be one of the more rewarding experiences a writer can have. It can also be one of the most lucrative. I've written dozens of short stories, and even a few novels, that never were published. With my collaborative efforts, I'm four for four.

Two heads really are better than one.

Should We Collaborate?

Do I like and respect this person? Y N

Do I admire this person's writing? Y N

Do we have a shared vision for this project? Y N

Do we have the same audience/market in mind? Y N

Am I willing to lose a few arguments? Y N

Do we agree on the division of authority? Y N

Are we using an outline? Y N

Do we agree on rights and author credit? Y N

Do we agree on the division of labor? Y N

Can we edit each other's words? Y N

You should only collaborate with someone if you each answered Y to all of these questions. The only exception is the question about outlines, but then you need to have the same answer, either Y or N.

My Top Ten Editing Tips

10. Put the writing away. A week is good. Two weeks is better. The longer you can stay away from it, the more you can forget what you wrote and approach it with fresh eyes.
9. Get the scissors. Sometimes the words are there, but in the wrong order. Don't be afraid to switch sentences, paragraphs, and even chapters.
8. Cut the first line, first paragraph, first page, first chapter. Often, much of the first part of a story is warm-up, and the plot doesn't start until later on. Make sure you begin with conflict, not backstory, description, or any type of exposition.
7. Read it out loud. You can find a lot of errors reading it using your voice, rather than your mind, because your mind tends to see things as you wrote them, not as they appear on the page. Vocalizing forces you to see the words, and the mistakes.
6. If you can cut it, cut it. As an exerrcise, write an entire story in 70 words. You'll quickly understand how important each word is in a story that short. Guess what? Each word is just as important in a story that is 1000, 10,000, or 100,000 words. If something can be omitted, it should be.
5. Explain yourself. In reality, you won't be perched on the reader's shoulder as they peruse your prose, defending why you wrote what you wrote. While you're editing, justify to yourself why you made that word choice, why that scene is necessary, why you chose that dialog.
4. Listen to criticism. Praise is great, but it's like candy. We love it, but it isn't good for us. We don't learn by being told we're terrific. We learn by being told we stink. Pay attention to what people say isn't working. If you've failed one reader, you'll wind up failing a lot.
3. Don't be afraid to throw it away. You've heard the gambling axiom "Don't throw good money after bad" which basically means you shouldn't try to salvage a loss. Sometimes the writing simply isn't working. Start over rather than try to put a fresh coat of paint on a dog turd.
2. Don't throw it away too soon. Yes, sometimes the writing is bad. But pretty much all first drafts are bad. We aren't etching words in stone, or even using typewriters. Computers make it possible to add, delete, cut, paste, and save multiple versions. Don't abandon it without giving it a lot of thought first.
1. We're not writers. We're rewriters. Nobody gets it right the first time. And even when you do sell it, you'll be required to make even more changes. This is a business. Leave the ego at the door, tuck away your integrity, and be prepared to work hard if you want to make some money in this biz.

Location, Location, Location

So let's talk about setting.

My series character, a Homicide cop named Jack Daniels, works out of Chicago. You may have heard it said (possibly by me) that when choosing the setting for your novel, the setting should be integral to the plot. If you're writing a book set in Chicago that could easily be set in Sheboygan, you aren't paying enough attention to your location.

I chose Chicago for Jack Daniels for several reasons, including:

Chicago has the second largest police force in the country, and it's still very much an old boys network, sexist and chauvinistic. Since Jack is a woman, this setting speaks to her character. She has to be tougher, smarter, and more determined than the cops she works with.

Chicago has one of the highest murder rates in the country, making it perfect for a busy Homicide cop.

Chicago is a city made up of diverse, distinct neighborhoods, which means I never have to travel far for a change of scenery.

Setting is also a place to make your story come alive in the readers mind. Reading is a mental trip to a new place. This is your chance, as a writer, to take readers to a world you've created. If it's based in the real world, make sure you get your facts straight. Research shouldn't take the place of writing, but it is certainly required if you want to paint an accurate picture in your reader's mind.

Though I chose Chicago —a place that really exists —the personality I give the setting comes from me. Many writers use Chicago as a back drop for their stories. But my Chicago isn't Libby Fischer Hellman's Chicago, or Marcus Sakey's Chicago, or Robert W. Walker's Chicago.

The feeling, or tone, you bring to your setting should enhance your story. Chicago can be scary, desperate, fun, exciting, sexy, moody, romantic, or deadly, depending on your personal voice.

In Afraid, the Wisconsin town of Safe Haven, population 904, is a small, easy-going community where everyone knows each other. Normally, an idyllic place to live. It's so small and quiet it doesn't even need a full time sheriff.

Then something horrifying comes to town and begins to wipe out the population. Everything that made Safe Haven a perfect place to live now makes it a perfect target.

The hometown feel it normally has quickly turns threatening, and the local hubs of the community, like the diner and the Junior High School, are perverted into places of our darkest fears.

In Trapped, I take a normally pleasurable event —camping in the woods —and turn it into the ultimate nightmare. What should be a night of campfire songs and roasting marshmallows becomes a fight for survival.

Weather plays a part in setting. The temperature and humidity can effect the mood of both the character and the reader. It also effects a character's actions. I've set books during all four seasons, in varying weather extremes, to enhance the story.

If done properly, your setting is almost like an extra character in your story, providing additional conflict and incentive for your protagonist. The things that exist within the setting become obstacles to overcome.

Have you picked the right setting for your story? Here's a quick checklist:

- ✓ Why is this setting the only setting that works for your story? You should have several reasons why it is interesting, unique, and essential.
- ✓ What research is needed to make this setting come alive for the reader? Do you have to visit it? Live there? Or is the Internet enough?
- ✓ What mood and tone do you want your setting to express? The background enhances the foreground.
- ✓ What conflicts does your setting add to the story? Physical and environmental, emotional and psychological?
- ✓ What's the weather like? Why are you choosing to make the weather that way?

As I'm fond of saying, I'm a storyteller. I'm not a characterteller, or a settingteller.

But even with the greatest plot in the world, if you have lame characters and an unmemorable setting, you're going to lose readers.

Choose your setting wisely, and be able to justify why you've chosen it.

Of course, if you really want to learn about setting, you should learn by example. As Salvador Dali said, "Those who do not want to imitate anything, produce nothing." So go buy all of my books and study how I use setting. They're conveniently available in print, as ebook downloads, and on audio.

10 Points on Craft

by Barry Eisler

(Examples, unless otherwise noted, borrowed from manuscripts I've critiqued in workshops.)

1. Show, Don't Tell. We all know what this means... or do we?

"Say that again," Jim said angrily.

Jim's eyes narrowed and his ears seemed almost to flatten against the sides of his head. "Say that again," he said.

See the difference? Of course you do. But why is the second one better?

The second is better because the reader gets only gets the facts and has to come to her own conclusion about what those facts mean. In the first, the writer is also acting as interpreter, in effect telling the reader "trust me, I'll draw the conclusions for you." It's inherently unsatisfying to have someone do the concluding for you. I believe there's a physiological explanation: what happens when you don't get a joke, and someone explains it to you? You understand it now, but you never laugh, right? For the emotion to catalyze, you have to connect the dots yourself. If you want your writing to have emotional impact (that is, to not be boring) you have to present the facts and let the reader draw the conclusions. Just like in a joke.

"Just be careful," Strunk warned. Do we need to be told this is a warning? If you need to emphasize that this is a warning, rather than, say, a loving recommendation, just write whatever it was that made you conclude it was a warning. Was it a tone in Strunk's voice? His expression? That's what the reader needs, not an interpretation. Just the facts, ma'am...

Counter example, on "show don't tell" and some other points, too:

He looked up as the handle on the wheelhouse door turned and Danny stepped through. The cabin temperature dropped ten degrees in the time it took to dog down the door behind him with a clang. Danny pulled off his chouk and shook the ice crystals out of his hair like Bill's Jack Russell after its bath. His cheeks — what could be seen of them above his curly brown beard — were bright red; each with a white patch in the middle the size of a quarter where the skin was just beginning to freeze.

A lesser writer might have just said, "Danny looked half-frozen." See the difference? Look again, and you'll see other things that are working, too, mostly in the details (the cabin temperature dropping, the white patches), and also in the imagery (a dog shaking itself, which might hint at something about Danny's personality? See how good writing accomplishes many things at once, as discussed below). Also note how unobtrusively the physical description of Danny is built into the scene.

2. Point of View (POV). Uncontrolled shifts in POV are always jarring. They can also tell rather than show. Examples:

"Flatt dropped to his knees, slid the computer out for working room, and pulled out a screwdriver."

In the descriptions of Flatt's various actions, the writer is way in the background and the reader is right there in the room, experiencing the action directly, without an intermediary. But in the middle of all that there's that "for working room," which feels to me like the writer's explanation for what's going on. It's jarring and inherently less interesting, too. Trust the reader to come to his own conclusions about why Flatt might have slid out the computer.

"High heels be damned, she ran down the street towards number Twenty-Eight."

The first clause is the character thinking. The second is the author narrating. You can't switch abruptly from one to the other without jarring the reader out of the story.

3. Detail. Everything you write has to be in the service of the story. If it doesn't serve the story, cut it.

So, how much detail should you give about setting, the characters' appearances, etc.? Remember what Abraham Lincoln said when asked how long a man's legs should be: "Long enough to reach the ground." Ask yourself: how does the detail serve the story? Why am I giving detail here?

4. Feed and Starve. All good writing conveys necessary information while simultaneously feeding a hunger for more information. Necessary information is always some variant on who, what, where, when, why, how. The best example I can think of is the opening of Ken Follett's "Key to Rebecca." Read it and ask yourself what necessary information Follett is providing — that's what grounds you in the universe of the story. Then ask yourself what questions the provided information implicitly raises — that's what hooks you. You need to do both: the first without the second is boring because it answers all questions and obviates suspense; the second without the former is irrelevant and therefore uninteresting.

5. The Five Senses. Engage all the senses — not just visual. If you're describing a place, what are the ambient sounds? What does it smell like? Temperature? Humidity? How does it all make the character feel? How it makes the character feel ought to be relevant to some aspect of her personality, which in turn should advance the plot... see point 4...

6. Who and What. Nothing else will work if you don't first get the reader to care about your characters.

Sometimes people argue over what matters more in a story: characters or plot. The argument is silly because a story is both, plus setting (I think of these as who, what, and where). Character without plot is a resume. Plot without character is as boring as the recitation of someone else's dream. Setting without character and plot is a still life. You need all three, and all three need to work off each other.

But I will say this: humans are hardwired to care much more about who than they do about what. In December 2004, a quarter million people died in a tsunami. If you didn't know any of the victims personally, how much did it really affect you? How much was it on your mind on any given day? Conversely, if someone cuts you off in traffic and flips you the bird, how upsetting is that?

The first event is monumental, but you didn't care about who so you weren't affected by what. The second event is absurdly trivial, but it happened to the most important person in your world — you — so it mattered a lot. What does this tell you about character in a story?

If the reader doesn't care about who, he'll never care about what.

By the way, my definition of literary fiction is fiction that relies on who to advance the story. The more the story depends on what, the more you're talking about genre. If your characters are truly compelling, you don't need to have the fate of western civilization hanging in the balance to get readers to care (but it can't hurt, either). Of course, the best fiction has all three: who, what, where. Think "Lonesome Dove." Not a coincidence that it won the Pulitzer...

7. Keep Writing. Can't emphasize this one enough. Every day is ideal, but the goal is to just be as regular as you can. The process is similar to as learning a language, or a martial art, or a musical instrument. If you've got time and you're serious, a writer's workshop can be a huge help with motivation, feedback, and discipline. Google "Writer's workshops" and the name of your city and you'll probably be able to find a bunch

8. Read like a Writer. Reread passages from books you love and ask yourself, what is the author doing here that's working so well? And if you see something that you think is bad, ask yourself, why is this bad? What could the author have done differently to make it work?

Explain to yourself what techniques the writer is using. Because before you get to art, you have to master craft. (My definition of art and craft: it's a continuum, but generally speaking, art is what is unique to you, what would never have existed if you hadn't existed. Craft is technique. It can be learned, in fact can only be learned, through disciplined practice. Craft is all the things I'm talking about in this article. Using the five senses. Mastering control of POV. Highlighting the telling detail, the essence of a thing. Showing, not telling.)

9. Books on Writing. Stephen King's "On Writing" helped me a lot. David Morrell's "Lessons from a Lifetime of Writing" is also great. Sol Stein's "Stein on Writing" is packed with useful information. There are many others. But don't read the how-tos at the expense of your own writing. Whenever you have to choose, practice your writing instead. Novelist J.A. Konrath offers terrific writing tips on his website.

10. "What If?" One of your best friends as a writer is what I think of as the "what if" question. "What if someone cloned dinosaurs and planned to open a dinosaur theme park on a remote island?" ("Jurassic Park"). "What if a semi-yuppie drug dealer were about to do a seven year prison stretch?" ("The 25th Hour"). Etc. If the what-if question interests you enough, it'll lead you to other questions, all of the who, what, where, when, why, how variety. Follow those questions and you'll start to find your story.

Breaking In

How To Find An Agent Handout

How to *Find* an Agent and *$ell* Your Writing

A Practical Guide to the Impractical World of Publishing

by J.A. Konrath

Author of the Lt. Jack Daniels Mystery Series

Seven Tips for Breaking into Print

1. Always listen to industry pros; even if they wind up being wrong, you'll learn from the experience.

2. Seek criticism, not praise. Knowing what's wrong will help you improve.

3. Be ready and willing to rewrite and edit, a lot.

4. Read what's currently selling, and come up with comparable ideas.

5. Don't take rejection personally. This is a business, so be businesslike.

6. Make sure the Work is free from typos, spelling errors, and formatting problems.

7. NEVER GIVE UP.

Four Rewriting Secrets

1. Read your Work out loud —it helps you catch errors.

2. Put the Work away for a month before editing.

3. Cut up the Work with scissors–this allows you to rearrange scenes, and to see how the story works without them.

4. Take advice and try new things. Nothing will be lost; you can always revert back to the original. But everything can be gained.

How I Got My Agent and a Three Book Deal

I'd been waiting twelve years for that phone call.

"We have an offer," my agent told me.

The previous week had been agonizing. Fourteen of NY's biggest publishing houses were reading my mystery manuscript, Whiskey Sour. Each time the phone rang, I'd feel it in my bladder.

Anticipation wasn't a new experience for me. Jane Dystel had repped me for two earlier books. For each of them, she'd done a terrific job creating a buzz. From each of them, I'd gotten some wonderfully upbeat rejection letters. My prior novel even garnered some initial interest from St. Martin's, but they ultimately passed on buying it.

So when Jane called that day, telling me there was an actual offer, I was stunned speechless.

"Don't you want to know how much it is for?" Jane asked.

I nodded. When I realized she couldn't see the nod over the phone, I managed to squeak out a 'yes.'

"It's a six-figure offer, for the first three books in the series."

I found my voice after that. No words, really. Mostly whooping and screaming. After professing my undying love and devotion to Jane, and offering my truly heartfelt thanks and a kidney if she ever found herself in need, I asked when the contracts arrive.

"We're not taking the offer yet. There's another editor interested. I think I can get more."

Writers daydream a lot — it's a side-effect of creativity. In my mind I'd composed awards speeches for the Pulitzer, appeared on David Letterman, been at signings with lines around the block. But I'd never dreamed of this happening. Not to me.

Up to that point, my writing career had produced nothing but ulcers. Not for lack of trying, either. I'd written six novels, all gathering shelf-dust, and dozens of short stories. Since graduating college in '92, a week hadn't passed where I didn't get at least one rejection letter in the mail.

Like most of my writer friends, I walked a tightrope between self-doubt and egomania. On good days, I cursed the publishing world for not recognizing my obvious talent. On bad days, I realized every sentence I wrote was awful.

In 1999, after a million written words and over four hundred rejections, I decided to take a different approach. Instead of writing something, sending it out, and adding the subsequent bong letter to my Rejection Book, I dedicated myself to figuring out what I was doing wrong.

I write genre fiction; mystery, suspense, horror. For comparison, I selected some current, best-selling examples of each of these forms and read them back-to-back. Then I reread my early novels with the same critical eye.

The conclusion was startling; my first novels weren't very good.

They were riddled with typos, poor grammar, and creative spelling. They were also remarkably self-indulgent, showcasing a writer who was in love with his own voice, rather than one who made every word count.

The plots weren't bad, but they could have been streamlined. The pace was messy, sometimes grinding to a halt with long sections of clunky exposition. The characters were pretty good, but spent a lot of time doing things that had nothing to do with furthering the plot. Plus, I'm ashamed to admit, I had a modifier problem. No verb or noun went without several helpers. It was really extraordinarily amazingly hugely very unfortunately bad.

I found the corresponding rejections from these submissions. Many were form letters, but some had comments jotted in the margins.

When I'd first received them, I'd dismissed the comments. After all, those agents and editors were fools for rejecting me, because I knew better than they did. Bravado, to help take away the sting.

Looking at the comments again, I saw that several industry pros had pointed out the very problems I'd discovered on my own. One even said she would take another look if I did a major rewrite.

At the time, I shrugged it off. I never rewrote anything. Rewriting was for the less talented. (I wish I could go back in time and slap myself for being such a bonehead.)

So, I came up with a plan. For my next book, I'd write a bestseller.

The term 'high-concept' is often bandied around Hollywood, used to describe movies that have strong, central hooks. Blockbuster novels have hooks as well. "Shark kills swimmers on New York beach." "Little girl is possessed by the devil." "Science learns to clone dinosaurs." I wanted to write something like that; something that could be described in a brief sentence, but still perfectly conveyed the story idea.

I decided on something with universal appeal. The hook: Satan is being held and studied in a secret government laboratory.

It would be a cross between Jurassic Park and the Exorcist. A thriller that pits cutting edge technology against thousands of years of theology. Plus, it had the biggest monster of them all; a nine foot tall, cloven-hoofed Beelzebub, complete with bat wings, horns, and a predilection for eating live sheep.

To do the story justice, I knew I had to research the hell out of it, so to speak. When I had a confident grasp of the science and religion involved, I worked on developing characters that would interact with the demon, and a story line that would do the concept proud.

A year later, my techno thriller Origin was completed. But I was smart this time. I set it on a shelf for a month, and then read it again with fresh eyes.

There were errors, both mechanically and structurally.

So I rewrote the book. Then I rewrote it again. And again.

When I was finally satisfied I had something comparable to what was on the bestseller lists, I went back to my Rejection Book to review my previous queries. Again, it surprised me to see how poor they were.

The letters fell into two distinct categories; egocentric and desperate. Rather than succinctly pitch my novels, I'd been begging for them to be read, or stating how rich I'd make the publisher once they bought me.

Plus, I was shocked to see more typos and poor grammar.

For Origin, I took a different approach. I decided to do the same thing publishers do to sell books. I designed an ad campaign.

Rather than a standard query letter and sample chapters, I put together a four page package. The first page was a brief excerpt from the novel, when the hero first sees Satan sitting in a gigantic Plexiglas cage. The second page was styled like back-jacket copy, describing the story and the hook in a few sentences. The third page was an author bio, with a black and white photo. The final page was a simple note stating that the book was seeking representation, and my contact info.

No SASE. No return address. I didn't even personalize the note.

I made one hundred and twenty submission packages, and sent one to every fiction representative in the Writer's Digest Guide to Literary Agents.

I sent these on a Thursday.

By Tuesday, I had five calls from agents, all demanding to see the book.

I was in shock. Usually, an agent response took between three and twelve weeks. Now I had them fighting over me.

After sending out manuscripts to, by final count, twelve agents, I decided on Todd Keithley from Dystel & Goderich Literary Management. Todd was my age, had a specific plan to market me, and most of all, he loved the book.

There was rewriting. And more rewriting.

Todd generated a buzz in NY about Origin, and went out to the top fifteen publishers with an expiration date on the manuscript.

The waiting game began.

After two weeks of hope and letdown, Origin received its final rejection. According to editors, it was well written, but it slipped through the genre cracks. Was it horror? Sci-fi? Techno-thriller? Comedy? Where did this book fit on the shelves?

To compound the injury, Todd then left the agency to pursue a law career.

I was devastated.

Luckily, his boss saw potential in me. Before Todd bid his final adieu, I received a phone call from Jane Dystel, who asked, "What else have you got?"

I did have something else; another high concept idea that came to me while writing Origin. I pitched it over the phone to Jane.

"Write it," she said.

I did.

Another year passed, research and writing. When I finished, I gave Jane the same kind of ad campaign I'd designed for Origin.

Jane got behind it. She generated a buzz and went out to seventeen publishing houses.

Waiting time again. Whenever the phone rang, I pooped a brick. By the time the week was over, I could have built an entire house.

When the rejections rolled in, they mirrored those received by Origin. Many editors liked the writing, and liked the concept. But what kind of book was this? Was it a thriller, or a comedy, or sci-fi?

One publisher did show interest. There was a problem, however. The book was a hundred and thirty thousand words.

"Can you cut thirty thousand?"

I said I could. The effort was one of the most frustrating, yet rewarding, episodes in my writing career. Because I didn't want to affect the story, I delegated myself to trimming the fat.

And there was fat. A lot of it.

When I finished, the editor read the revision and said, "Cut another ten thousand words."

Now there was no choice; I had to cut story. I was forced to confront my novel and determine what was essential to the plot, and what could be left out without disturbing the narrative flow.

But I did it. And it improved the book.

The editor read this version and said, "You know, I think I like your concept more than your execution of the concept. Can you start over from the beginning?"

Jane stepped in before I popped a blood vessel.

"We'll move on to the next book, Joe."

For my third book with the agency, I decided to make sure I wrote in a specific, distinct, defined genre — the medical thriller. Also, because editors seemed puzzled by the amount of humor I was putting in my books, I completely cut out the jokes.

After another year of writing and research, I gave the results to Jane.

She hated it, and declined to represent it. Jane liked my sense of humor, and a novel of mine without jokes had no spark.

Time to rethink things.

I liked Jane a lot, as a person and as an agent, but I didn't think she'd keep me on as a client if I kept giving her books she couldn't sell.

My last three books were failures, but they were important failures. They taught me how to rewrite and follow professional advice. They taught me that I needed to use humor. They taught me that techno thrillers and medical thrillers weren't working for me.

But maybe a mystery series would work.

So I created Lieutenant Jack Daniels of the Chicago PD. I used every convention popular in successful mysteries; a flawed but funny protagonist, a recurring cast of oddball characters, a catchy title that instantly identified the series, a spring-loaded plot.

I gave Whiskey Sour to Jane, along with proposals for the second and third books in the series, Bloody Mary and Rusty Nail.

Jane loved it.

She helped me tweak the concept, and after two requisite rewrites, she went out with the book.

A week later, I got that phone call.

The series was ultimately bought by Hyperion Books. My new editor, Leslie Wells, had worked on mysteries with Ridley Pearson and Robert Crais; two of my favorite authors. She had ideas on how to make Whiskey Sour even better.

Naturally, I followed her advice to the letter. And naturally, the book improved as a result.

Whiskey Sour will be released in hardcover, June of 2004.

Reflecting on everything that has happened, I can draw a few conclusions.

1. I didn't get anywhere until I treated writing like a business, rather than like winning the lottery. Business requires hard work, dedication, and market savvy.

2. Ego held me back. It was only when I realized that everything I wrote wasn't golden, that I began to improve.

3. There is no conspiracy in the industry that keeps new writers from getting published. I'd been given good advice from pros throughout the years, but hadn't been mature enough to follow the advice.

4. Even after years of work without selling anything, I never gave up. This is the most important truth I learned. There's a word for writers who never says die. . . the word is published.

I'm positive there are people reading this who are much better writers than I am. You're probably one of them.

Remember that talent is only a small part of the equation. You also need persistence, humility, and a sense of humor. Good writing won't ever be seen unless it's well edited and marketed.

Success is within your grasp. If I can do it, so can you. Guaranteed.

See you in print!

Critiquing Worksheet Instructions

Rate the story in each of the following categories using 1 through 5 (5 being the best):

The Hook - does the story pull the reader in right away and then hold their interest?

The Conflict - what is at stake in the story, and how is the tension used?

The Characters - are these compelling, real people whom the reader cares about?

Setting and Mood - does the story make the reader feel like they are really there?

Pace and Style - how well does the writer use the words to move the story along?

Resolution - does it have a satisfying ending?

Grammar and Spelling - this must be perfect, no exceptions.

Overall Enjoyment - was this a story you'd actually buy?

These eight topics, worth five points each, are a good indicator of if a story is publishable or not. The higher the point total, the likelier the story can be sold.

Critiquing Sheet

Rate each category on a scale of 1 (worst) to 5 (best)

Hook	
Conflict	
Characters	
Setting/Mood	
Pace/Style	
Resolution	
Spelling/Grammar	
Enjoyment	

You can use this Crit Sheet for short stories and novels, published or pre-published. You can also give it to readers and ask them to rate your story. The more readers, the better.

Low points in categories indicate what needs to be worked on in the rewrite. Don't submit stories to agents or editors unless you have a score of at least 35.

Submitting

1. Target your market – If you want to sell to mothers, you put flyers on cars in a daycare parking lot. If you want to sell a mystery, you seek out agents and publishers who deal with mysteries. There are many books that say this, but you should take it a step further. READ the mysteries that this agent has represented, or this editor has published. Are they a lot like yours? If so, you've found your target market. Now let's make them want you...

2. Make the packaging attractive – Follow your target's submission guidelines to the letter. Double space, 250 words a page, 20# paper, etc. But why not add a little something extra? I'm not saying send flowers or enclose twenty bucks, but if you're trying to sell a book, treat it like a book.

You can:

—Include a page with a black and white photo of you, with abrief bio.

—Include a page of back cover teaser copy — those catchy zingers that make you buy a new book while in line at the WalMart. Try two or three with different styles and wordings. Play with font size and style, to get it to look like the back of Koontz's latest.

—Include a short synopsis that reads like inner jacket copy.

—Include a juicy outline of the book, only a few pages long, showing the target that you know how to tell a good story.

—Include a page of blurbs by other pros (not from friends or family–use only professional writers, editors, and agents. It never hurts to email your favorite author. Or better yet,there are many conferences and conventions where authors meet. Go there and shmooze.

The ultimate goal is to make your work seem familiar to the target, yet stand out at the same time. This is the essence of packaging anything, from candy bars to pop stars.

If you're selling a short story, make sure you've read the market you're submitting to. Get a copy of their submission guidelines. When you send the story, mail it flat, no staples or binding, making sure your name is in the upper right hand corner of each numbered page.

Also make sure the editor you're submitting to is still there, and include a SASE for their response.

3. Have an irresistible product – This one is the hardest, but also the most important. You have to make sure your writing is the best it can be. Don't send out your manuscripts with hope. Hope is for people who don't try. This isn't the lottery, where one lucky person wins it all. This is a job where only the best succeed. If you aren't sending your best, you're wasting everyone's time. So make it happen. Success is inevitable if you prepare for it.

You want proof? How many published books have you read that were crap? Yet they were published. Make that your mantra. PEOPLE WITH LESS TALENT THAN ME HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED! They aren't better writers. They just tried harder. So prove your talent to the world. Treat your submission

process with the same respect you treat your writing. Market like your life depends on it, and make your submissions rejection-proof.

Fiction Markets

Some places to find agents and markets for your fiction:

Novel and Short Story Writer's Market by Writer's Digest Books (www.writersdigest.com)

Writer's Market Guide to Literary Agents by Writer's Digest Books

Writer's Guide to Book Editors, Publishers, and Literary Agents by Jeff Herman Prima Press (www.primapublishing.com)

Writer's Handbook by The Writer, Inc. (www.writermag.com)

Writer's Digest Magazine (www.writersdigest.com)

The Writer Magazine (www.writermag.com)

Mystery Writers of America (www.mysterywriters.org)

Science Fiction Writers of America (www.sfwa.org)

Horror Writers Association (www.horror.org)

Romance Writers of America (www.rmanational.com)

The Directory of Small Presses (www.dustbooks.com)

There are many other places available to find markets–pick up any magazine, and it usually has submission information somewhere inside. Or go to your favorite magazine's website– everyone has a website these days.

You can also check out the Literary Market Place at the library or online at www.literarymarketplace.com. Or try an internet search for 'writing markets' on www.dogpile.com, www.google.com, or any other search engine.

How-To Books

Some books that will help you improve your writing and marketing skills:

Your Novel Proposal by Cameson and Cook

Making Shapely Fiction by Stern

Writing Popular Fiction by Carr

12 Keys to Writing Books That Sell by Krull

The Sell Your Novel Toolkit by Lyon

Everything How to Get Published Book by Rubie

Complete Idiot's Guide to Getting Published by Bykofski

Getting Your Book Published for Dummies by Zackhiem

How to Get Happily Published by Applebaum

Spider, Spin Me a Web by Block

These should be available at your local library or book store, or online at www.amazon.com, www.bn.com, www.booksamillion.com.

Query Letters

A query is a question. A query letter is a letter that asks an agent/editor if they are interested in you or a piece of your writing. For our purpose, we're going to be discussing short story queries. But before you query anyone, you have to have a few things:

1. A finished story, as perfect as you can make it– no typos, spelling errors, crossed out words, whiteout drips, etc. It should be typed, double spaced, a readable font (Courier 12 poiny or similar), roughly 250 words per page, each page numbered with your name in the right hand corner.

2. A place to send the story– a magazine, literary journal, website, anthology, etc. You need an address and submission guidelines, and you also need to know if they are currently accepting submissions.

3. A contact at that place– an editor's name. You don't need to know Ed personally, but you have to make sure that Ed is still working there. Submissions to "Dear Editor" or "To Whom it May Concern" are thrown away. And make sure you spell Ed's name right!

4. Mailing stuff– good 20# white paper, first class 9"x12" envelopes, letter sized envelops (for the SASE), and plenty of stamps.

Simple enough? Good. Now the query is made up of 4 main parts:

THE GREETING – Dear Ms. Whomever.

THE HOOK – Catch the editor's attention with your first line, and sail right into your story pitch.

THE BIO – Who are you? What have you published before?

CLOSING – Thanks, hope to hear from you soon.

Anything else is extraneous and a waste of Ed's time. Why waste twenty sentences to describe your story in the query? Describe it in five sentences, and make Ed want to read it.

Queries shouldn't be longer than a page. The writing should be perfect, compelling, and error-free. Ed is a professional. Present yourself as a pro as well. Don't waste Ed's time being talky, cute, or amateurish. Get to the point, and get out of there.

NEVER call Ed, unless you know her or already have a publishing contract with her. Phone queries waste Ed's time; at worst, she'll dislike you, and at best, she'll ask to see your writing, which you should have sent in the first place.

I have had some success with online queries, but before you send Ed an email make sure:

1. Ed accepts electronic submission.

2. You send in the proper format (txt, doc, pdf, rtf, etc.)

3. You've followed all of the above rules.

Conventional Query Package for On The Rocks

Janet Hutchings

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine

475 Park Avenue South

New York, NY 10016

Dear Janet–

My name is Joe Konrath, and I've recently sold a mystery series to Hyperion. The first book, WHISKEY SOUR, will be released in hardcover May 2004. The lead character is a Chicago Homicide Lieutenant named Jacqueline Daniels.

Jack's ability to excel in a male-dominated profession is due to her relentless determination, keen insight, and self-effacing sense of humor. She can solve the cases that no one else can–such as the one I've enclosed.

ON THE ROCKS is a 4500 word novella in which Jack is faced with a classic mystery scenario; a locked room murder.

The victim is found with the murder weapon in her hand, the only entrance door locked from the inside. Suicide? Or is it just meant to look that way?

I've been a fan of EQMM for over twenty years, and you were my first choice for ON THE ROCKS. I hope you enjoy it–and please let me know if you can solve the mystery.

Looking forward to hearing from you soon.

All Best,

Joe Konrath

Finding An Agent

My first novel, Whiskey Sour, was released in hardcover, May of 2004. It's a thriller featuring Chicago Violent Crime Lt. Jack Daniels. My publisher, Hyperion, will also put out the next two books in the series.

My agent landed this deal for me, and it was a significant deal; six-figures for worldwide hard/soft rights. It was also my very first deal. I hadn't published a thing prior to Whiskey Sour. No short stories, no articles, not so much as a letter to the editor in a magazine.

How did a guy with no publishing record get both an agent and a big book deal? Was I a Cinderella Story, being at the right place at the right time? Did I know some industry big shot who made a few phone calls? Did I use blackmail, bribery, or extortion?

No, no, and no-no-no. I'm actually a slush-pile success–a guy who got noticed by writing unsolicited queries. But much as I'd like to say that my very query letter catapulted me to success, that's not the case.

The truth is, I'd written nine previous novels, and garnered over four hundred rejections, before getting my big break. Throughout twelve years of writing and marketing, I've made every mistake a writer could make. Because of this, I've learned quite a bit about the New York publishing business first-hand, and have assembled some hard-won tips based on my own experience.

Getting an agent as an amateur isn't easy. After receiving enough form-letter rejections to wallpaper my house, I began to wonder if my queries were even getting read. I'd heard rumors about agents and editors hiring college students to do nothing put open submissions and mail back rejections. These rumors, it turned out, were true.

The how-to books all stated that the way to approach agents is with a one page query letter and the first three chapters of the novel. I'd followed that route many times and failed. It was time to try something different.

The plan I devised was similar to the same plan used by publishing houses to sell books. Namely, I marketed myself. The result was this four page query package:

Page Number One was back jacket copy. The backs of paperback books always condense the story down into a few juicy sentences. Pick up a few bestsellers and read the back. They always make the book sound like a blockbuster. I decided to do the same for my book, and after writing a pithy, catchy description, played with the font and layout until it mimicked the real thing.

Page Number Two was an author bio and photograph. Hardcovers always have this, and because I wanted to be treated like a professional, I included this as well. My wife took a black and white picture of me in a snooty author pose, and I added a few sentences about who I was. I couldn't include any publishing experience because I didn't have any, but I tried to make myself sound interesting.

Page Number Three was a one page excerpt from the novel. It was a moment of high tension and reveal, loaded with conflict, and formatted to look like an actual book page.

Page Number Four was a very brief letter describing the project, and giving my email address and phone number.

No SASE. No sample chapters. Not even a return address–if they wanted to contact me, they could call.

I found 125 NY agents that represented fiction through various resource books and www.aar-online.org. Each got a photocopy of my four page submission package, mailed in a plain white legal-sized envelope. I addressed the envelopes to specific agents' names, but the actual letters weren't personalized.

Then I sat back and waited, wondering if my little experiment would work. Normal response time from an agent took anywhere from three weeks to ten months, but I was hoping this innocuous-looking letter would avoid the slush pile and be opened right away. I turned out to be correct.

I sent them out on a Thursday.

By the following Tuesday, five agents had called me up.

Within two weeks, I'd gotten a total of twelve agents interested. I picked the one who was the most enthusiastic, who also had some great ideas for marketing me and my novel.

Unfortunately, that novel didn't sell. Neither did the next two.

But my agency believed in me, I continued to hone my craft, and novel number ten went up for auction and became the first thing I ever sold.

So after twelve years and over a million written words, I'm an overnight success.

The turning point in my career can directly be traced to one event: my change in attitude. When I stopped thinking of writing as a dream, and began thinking about it as a business, I landed my agent.

By marketing myself in a catchy, original way, and treating myself like a professional, I got agents to treat me like a pro as well. Rather than break into publishing from a position of weakness and taking whatever is offered, I was able to pick and choose among agents, and ultimately publishers, because I gave them something they could sell.

It worked for me. It can work for you, too.

Unconventional Query Package for Origin Page 1

1906-Something is discovered by workers digging the Panama Canal. Something dormant. Sinister. Very much alive.

2001-Project Samhain. A secret underground government installation begun 95 years ago in New Mexico. The best minds in the world have been recruited to study the most amazing discovery in the history of mankind. But the century of peaceful research is about to end.

BECAUSE THE THING JUST WOKE UP.

ORIGIN by Joe Konrath

You can't contain evil.

Origin Query Package Page 2

"You've got Satan in there," Andy said.

"Don't worry," General Murdoch replied with a big Southern grin. "He's not violent. I've even been in the dwelling with him. He's just scary looking, is all. And that Plexiglas barrier is rated to eight tons It's as safe as visiting the monkey house at the zoo."

Andy tried to find the words.

"You're a lunatic," he decided.

"Look, I've been watching over him for thirty years. We've had the best in the world here —doctors, scientists, holy men, you name it. We've found out a lot, but the rest is just guessing. Now he's finally awake, and trying to communicate. You're the key to that. Don't you see how important this is?"

The linguist looked at the thing; nine feet tall, mouth crammed full of jagged teeth, rubbery wings billowing out behind it like a giant black parachute.

"Biix a beel," it said.

Andy ran like hell.

ORIGIN by Joe Konrath

Time to give the devil his due.

Origin Query Package Page 3

In reality, Satan is not a handsome gentleman as portrayed by a Hollywood leading man. Viewing him through the Plexiglas, he's a frightening beast, massively muscled, with hoofs the size of washtubs and the serrated teeth of a carnivore. The demon can be pleasant, even

chatty, and delights in showing off his power of resurrecting the dead sheep he dines upon. To some of the staff studying him at the secret government compound, he's even likable.

That is, until he breaks out.

ORIGIN is a mainstream thriller combining the techno-science of Crichton with the theological horror of Blatty. Let this unconventional submission serve as a solicitation for author representation. Thank you for your time.

ORIGIN by Joe Konrath

Call or email for

Sample chapters

Brief Synopsis

Detailed Outline

or

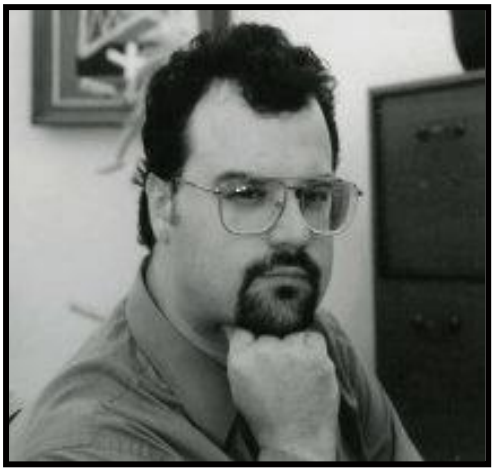
Request the entire manuscript on an exclusive basis

(123) 555-5555 haknort@comcast.net

Billions around the world fear the concept of the devil.

Now they'll have a chance to fear him in person.

Origin Query Package Page 4



J.A. Konrath graduated from Columbia College in Chicago in 1992.

He's written for corporate and cable television, assisted the brewmeister at a local micro brewery, performed improv comedy on stage, and regularly attends mystery and horror conventions.

Joe has one wife, three kids (that he knows of), a dog, and a house in the suburbs, where he's hard at work on a his second novel. Email him at haknort@comcast.net.

Six Things You Should Never Put in a Query

1. Don't be needy. Pros don't mope and moan about how hard the publishing biz is, or beg to be read. I once started a query, "I've had forty rejections on this book so far, but I'm not giving up yet." Do you think the editor even bothered to look at the manuscript?

2. Don't be cocky. Telling the editor or agent how rich you'll make them, or how brilliant your idea is, always backfires. For my fourth unpublished novel, I send out a query that stated, "Here's your next blockbuster." Among the form letter rejections I received, one had a hand-written note that said, "Guess again."

3. Don't use fancy paper. There are many wonderful colors and patterns of paper available at the office supply store. I've used pink, blue with white clouds, intricate Aztec borders, and paper that appeared to be stained with blood. The rejections I got back were on plain, white, 20# bond, because that's what professionals use.

4. Don't use fancy font. Stick with Times New Roman, Arial, or Courier, 12 pt and double spaced. I tried sending a query once using an exotic, caligraphy font, because I thought it made me stand out and appear intelligent. The agent returned it asking, "Next time, submit in English."

5. Don't include a SASE. Everyone in NY requests that you send a self addressed stamped envelope for a reply. In fairness to the publishing biz, they get a ton of unsolicited manuscripts every day, and couldn't afford to send rejection letters to everyone out of their own pocket. Keep in mind that SASEs are for rejections. In fact, it makes it even easier for them to reject you. If they want your work, they'll gladly spring for the stamp, or call on the phone. Do you think Tom Clancy sends SASEs?

6. Don't address is to unknowns. Dear Editor and Dear Sir letters get thrown away. Find out who the editor is, and then call up and make sure that editor still works there. Publishing is a turbulent business, and editors are constantly moving from house to house. Make sure you've addressed you package to a real person who still works there.

Five Ways to Look Like a Pro

1. Have your own website. The publishing business is becoming increasingly internet dependant. Editors spend a lot of time online. A good looking homepage, with a bio, writing samples, and contact information, is a cheap and easy way to get noticed.

2. Roll with the punches. If an editor suggests changing something, go with it. Always. This is a business, and should be treated like one. Pros don't let their egos interfere with their work.

3. Be personable. Editors and agents don't want to work with someone who isn't enjoyable to be around. Writers who are easily upset, depressed, anxious, or overly enthusiastic don't last very long in this business.

4. Make deadlines. Always. No excuses. If you're always early, you'll be loved for it.

5. Cloak yourself in the trappings of professionalism. Have business cards and letterhead, a fax machine, an email address, and an office phone. I answer my phone, "J.A. Konrath." It's much more effective than "Hello?"

What Agents Want

1. A book they can sell.

2. A writer who is easy to work with.

3. A writer who can accept advice and criticism.

4. A writer who understands the market.

5. A writer who can meet deadlines.

6. A writer who is in it for the long haul.

7. A writer who doesn't call and pester them constantly.

8. A writer who is grateful.

Staying On Track

1. Develop a routine. Writing every day isn't necessary, but you should regularly schedule time to write, and stick to that schedule.

2. Set writing goals. Daily. Weekly. Monthly. Yearly. Reward yourself when you reach these goals.

3. Unplug the internet while you're writing.

4. Spend an equal amount of time on self-promotion as you do on writing. This means making contacts, creating a website, attending conferences, and submitting short stories. Short stories pay poorly, but they're extremely important for getting your name out there. Try to send out a few every month.

5. Get feedback. It's tough to write in a vacuum. As writers, we need readers. Family, friends, peers. Luxuriate in the praise, but pay close attention to the criticism —what isn't working is often more important than what is working

6. If you get a story or a novel rejected over and over again, MOVE ON. There's no conspiracy keeping you from getting published. You've been rejected because your book isn't good enough, or it doesn't seem profitable to the publisher. Get over it and write something else.

Mistakes Newbies Make

No one is born knowing how to write. Storytelling is part art, part craft. Writing for publication is even harder, since so many writer vie for so few slots. After penning over a million words and garnering almost 500 rejections before earning a dime, I've made just about every mistake a newbie can make. Here is a list of some of the biggies:

Doing everything but writing. Talking about writing, reading about writing, taking writing classes, and joining writing groups, discussing writing online, attending writing conventions, are not substitutes for sitting down and actually writing. Writers write.

Not finishing. Don't be the writer who has ten projects going at once but never finishes any of them. Complete a project to the end.

Not submitting. Don't be the writer who has a drawer full of finished manuscripts but no rejection slips because you didn't ever send them to agents or editors. If you want to sell, you have to query.

Writing whatever you feel like. If you desire publication, you need to know your target market, your genre, and where your work fits into the whole scheme of things. That means thinking about your audience before you put pen to paper, not after.

Telling instead of showing. *Jen was nervous* is bad. *Jen wiped her sweaty palms on her jeans* is good.

Seeking praise. Praise is like candy–we like it, but it's bad for us. You can't learn from praise. Seek criticism instead, and strive to improve.

Not following guidelines. Always use proper manuscript format: Double spaced, one inch margins, 12pt Courier font, name and page number in the upper right hand margin. Don't give someone a reason to reject you before they've read a word—and they will, if you don't follow guidelines.

Being an island. The more you network, the more you learn, the more contacts you make that might help you. Attend writing conferences. Meet authors and ask them questions. Join a writer's group and get feedback.

Not writing. You have a family, friends, hobbies, a job, and you need to take time out to eat, sleep, and unwind. If you want to be a writer, you have to make time. That means sacrificing one or more of these things in order to get the book finished.

Going it alone. Many newbie writers figure they can sell their books without an agent. Some of them do. But you'll get a better deal, and more offers, with an agent. Plus, an agent will act as a buffer between you and the editor when needed, give you career advice, sell subsidiary rights, and help build your career.

Listening too much. Most of your future writing teachers won't be successful authors. Conversely, pros sometimes aren't the best teachers. Take all advice with a grain of salt, using what works and discarding what doesn't.

Paying. Money flows toward the writer. Never pay for anything other than an occasional book, class, or conference. Don't pay to be published, pay to be edited, pay for an agent, or pay to enter contests.

Not reading. If you want to be a writer, you must first be a reader. Check out new books by first time authors to get an idea of what is currently selling.

Treating writing as art. Being an artist is fine. But once you try to sell your work, you're a businessperson. The only way to succeed in publishing is to remember that your work is a commodity that will be bought and sold. Want to sell a book? Write something that 20,000 complete strangers will spend $25 for.

Not listening to editors. Editors are the ones that buy the writing. They read more than you, have more experience than you, and have a clearly defined focus of what they want. Give them what they want.

Starting at the beginning. The beginning is boring. Start in the middle, where the action is. Your first line is the most important line in your story. If you don't hook the reader right away, the reader will move on to something else.

Not using enough conflict. All stories are about a mess that needs to be cleaned up. The bigger the mess, the more engaging the book. Happy characters without problems aren't interesting. Your protagonist must have goals. Conflict arises when the protag can't attain these goals.

Relying on exposition. Description and backstory bring the story to a screeching halt. Less is always more. Reveal the story through action and dialog, and give the reader just enough information to picture the scene.

Giving up. This is a hard business–one of the hardest. Breaking in requires a lot of luck, but you can improve your odds by being persistent. Fate is simply a future that you didn't change.

Submission Guidelines

Believe it or not, your writing may not be the only reason you get rejected. If you don't follow correct manuscript formatting, and overworked agent or editor may file you in the round cabinet before reading a single word.

And even if you do have the proper manuscript presentation, you can easily make some newbie mistake to turn the editor off. Here are some important tips to keep in mind.

1. **Font.** Sound silly? It's not. Read for ten hours straight, then try to squint at some joker who crammed 1000 words on a page using 8pt Helvetica. You wanted to save paper and postage. Editors want to save their eyes. Use 12pt Times New Roman or Courier. ALWAYS!!!!!

2. **Paper.** Cheap paper, thin paper, colored paper, multiple folds, stains of dubious origin, rips and tears, too many staples —-999 times out of 1000, if the paper is crummy, the story is crummy. But whenever an editor sees 24# ultra white paper (go for 104 bright) she perks right up. Sound silly? It's not. Use good paper, no folds, binding other than a paperclip if needed. Show her the work is important. If you serve lobster, you use bone China, not plastic McDonald's Hamburgler plates.

3. **Ink.** If it is dot matrix, or typewriter, or colored ink, or smeared ink, or ink that's running low, or has ballpoint pen or White Out ANYWHERE on it to make corrections, the editor can safely assume the story is bad. If you want to impress a date, wear expensive clothes. If you want to impress an editor, buy a decent laser printer.

4. **Spacing.** If an editor sees big blocky paragraphs, more than 25 lines per page, no indenting, indenting 3 spaces or less (rather than 5), line spacing between paragraphs, or a story that begins on the first line of the first page rather than halfway down the first page, her subconscious says, "I don't want to read this" and her subconscious is usually right.
5. These first four criteria should tell you that the way the story looks on a page is incredibly important. Did you ever go to a website that was so hard to read you didn't bother? It's the same thing with submissions. Make it look professional, or it won't even get read. Think eye-friendly. Think lots of white space.

6. **Typos.** If an agent sees a typo, grammar error, spelling mistake, or anything that says to her, "The writer didn't proof read" it's going to get a form letter rejection. Sorry, but agents and editors have to read thousands of other books, and they can't waste their time. You obviously don't take this seriously, so why should they?

7. **First Sentence.** If you don't draw Ed in at the first sentence, and you made any of the above mistakes, you're rejected. If you have a lousy first sentence (usually describing the weather, or details about the setting, or telling instead of showing, or something awkward and confusing, or explaining what is going to happen later) Ed MAY read on if you didn't make any other mistakes, but she'll be leery. You

want her excited, not leery.

8. **Dialog.** So many submissions don't have any dialog on the all-important first few pages. If there's no dialog, that's a good indicator the story is all telling, all exposition. Round file.

9. **Ending.** Shocking as these stats are, an editor may only completely read 1 out of every 40 or 50 stories. Nothing irks her more than reading an entire story, only to find a weak ending. Make sure the destination is worth the trip.

10. **Conflict.** If Ed manages to get a page into the story, and nothing has happened yet, she won't get any further.

11. **Memoir.** Unless you're one of the Rolling Stones, don't write anything autobiographical. Sorry, but you just ain't interesting to anyone other than yourself.

12. **Adjectives and Adverbs, Exclamation Points, Repeating the same words, using the passive 'was' a lot, onomatopoeia, dialects, a first paragraph of nothing but setting, explanations, preaching, and anecdotes.** Attempt at your own risk.

Remember: You want to submit a nice clean manuscript, your last name and page number up in every right corner, one inch margins. double-spaced, 250 words per page average.

If you want an example of proper manuscript format, here's a short story I wrote called **The Big Guys**. It won a Derringer Award for short fiction. Pay attention to how it looks on the page. And if you want to see a difference, print it up on an inkjet printer using 20# paper with 84 brightness, and then print it using a laser printer using 24# paper and 104 brightness. The difference will amaze you.

Download a pdf of **THE BIG GUYS HERE.**

Query Secrets

Okay, welcome to Marketing 101. You're all writers, eh? Doesn't matter. Forget about the writing for the moment. The fact is, you have something to sell. Could be a book, a snowblower, a bag of apples. Makes no difference. Everything sells by the same process. Namely, consumer interest.

Everyone buys things. What do you buy, and why?

You buy what you know, are familiar with, and have bought successfully in the past.

You buy things you believe you will like, based on what you know, are familiar with, and have bought successfully in the past.

Okay, so the trick is to make your product something that your consumer will believe he or she will like. How do other people do this?

1. Target your market — If you want to sell to moms, you put flyers on cars in a daycare parking lot. If you want to sell a mystery, you seek out agents and publishers who deal with mysteries. There are many books that say this, but you should take it a step further. READ the mysteries that this agent has represented, or this editor has published. Are they a lot like yours? If so, you've found your target market. Now let's make them want you...

2. Make the packaging attractive — Follow your target's submission guidelines to the letter. Double space, 250 words a page, 20# paper, etc. But why not add a little something extra? I'm not saying send flowers or enclose twenty bucks, but if you're trying to sell a book, treat it like a book.

- Include a page with a black and white photo of you, with a brief bio.
- Include a page of back cover teaser copy — those catchy zingers that make you buy a new book while in line at the K-Mart. Try two or three with different styles and wordings. Play with font size and style, to get it to look like the back of Koontz's latest. Include a short synopsis that reads like inner jacket copy.
- Include a juicy outline of the book, only a few pages long, showing the target that you know how to tell a good story.
- Include a page of blurbs by other pros (not from friends or family — use only professional writers, editors, and agents. It never hurts to email your favorite author. Or better yet, there are many conferences and conventions where authors meet. Go there and schmooze.)

The ultimate goal is to make your work seem familiar to the target, yet stand out at the same time. This is the essence of packaging anything, from candy bars to pop stars.

If you're selling a short story, make sure you've read the market you're submitting to. Get a copy of their submission guidelines. When you send the story, mail it flat, no staples or binding, making sure your name is in the upper right hand corner of each numbered page.

Also make sure the editor you're submitting to is still there, and include a SASE for their response.

3. Have an irresistible product — This one is the hardest, but also the most important. You have to make sure your writing is the best it can be. Don't send out your manuscripts with hope. Hope is for people who don't try. This isn't the lottery, where one lucky person wins it all. This is a job where only the best succeed. If you aren't sending your best, you're wasting everyone's time.

Make it happen. Believe success is inevitable. You want proof? How many published books have you read that were crap? Yet they were published. Make that your mantra. **PEOPLE WITH LESS TALENT THAN ME HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED!** They aren't better writers. They just tried harder.

So prove your talent to the world. Treat your submission process with the same respect you treat your writing. Market like your life depends on it, and make your submissions rejection-proof.

Driving Miss SASE

A reader emailed me to make me aware of a post on a popular anonymous agent's blog.

Someone asked this agent if including a SASE is necessary, because on JA Konrath's website, he says don't bother including SASEs.

Now, for a moment, we'll pretend we're not all art majors and make an attempt to think rationally. Can anyone guess how the agent replied?

Here's a multiple choice:

1. "Joe's right. It would make my job a lot easier if none of the 17 million people who submitted to me included SASEs."
2. "Joe's right. On my website I just mention to include a SASE to test your grasp of reverse psychology."
3. Joe is a nitwit. Include a SASE.

Goodness knows I don't mind public ridicule. And goodness knows that if I were an agent, I'd also request SASEs, because the amount of slush those folks receive is overwhelming.

But this particular agent alluded to the fact that submissions without SASEs are always thrown away, and that she sometimes uses SASEs for acceptance letters.

If we're to believe this hip, savvy agent, we can infer that when she finds a manuscript she falls in love with, she doesn't pick up the phone to call the author. She doesn't shoot her an email. She types a letter, hunts down the SASE, and then sends it off and waits for the author to contact her after 3-7 days (which is how long the US Post Office typically takes.)

We could also infer that if an author looking to change agents, or a someone with a brilliant book, contacted her by mail but didn't include a SASE, their query would be thrown away.

Does that seem like a way a hip, savvy agent would run her business?

I wonder if that same agent includes a SASE with the books she submits to publishers on behalf of her authors. And if the editors, if they want to buy the book, use that SASE to break the good news. No SASE, no book sale.

Call me a skeptic, but I ain't buying.

SASEs are used for rejections. Always. I once had an agent tell me a story about how anxious he was because he read a wonderful submission but the author didn't include a phone number. This agent called 411, tried the Internet, phone books, and a half dozen other ways to call the guy *instead* of trusting the good news to a SASE. But he wound up having to use the SASE, and was a nervous wreck for a week, thinking some other agent signed the guy, before the author finally called.

My advice to writers is to not bother with the SASE, because all you'll get is a form letter rejection that you can live without. If the agent likes your writing, they'll call or email.

I've mentioned that pros don't use SASEs. And that SASEs send out a subliminal message that the author is a newbie. Something used only for rejection seems to me to beg rejection. Do frat pledges get any respect? Neither do newbie authors.

Now, I can't blame this agent her reaction. Of course she has to say what she says. It's a matter of self-preservation. And if I were the one writing her blog, I would have squelched that question in much the same way.

But what intrigued me is that she doesn't understand why writers would have problems with SASEs, because they're only 39 measly cents.

I want to make a point here. It's not about the 39 cents.

It's about empowerment.

I've gotten my share of rejections. Hundreds. All delivered in SASEs. If you've gotten them, you know how demoralizing, depressing, and disheartening it is to see that envelope in your mailbox. There's that sorry/sick feeling you get in your stomach —-all the hope you've been hanging onto, dashed.

By a show of hands, who likes rejection?

With my sixth novel, I stopped sending SASEs. Coincidentally, with my sixth novel, I got 12 offers of representation. And I got them within days of mailing the queries, rather than the 4 weeks to 8 months that prior rejections had taken.

So what should I preach? What they tell you to do, or what worked for me?

Of course an agent will never admit to you that all you'll ever get in a SASE is a rejection. That doesn't mean it's the truth.

I'd like to remind everyone that this is not an 'us vs. them' game. Writers want to find good agents, and agents want to find good writers. There is, however, a power dynamic that initially favors the agents. The agents are aware of this.

The person who does the rejecting, has the power. That person ain't you.

Some writers want to get that form letter rejection, to get a sense of closure. Or as proof that they're actively trying to succeed.

But I believe it's easier on the writer, and the agent, to not get a rejection letter. The agent saves time stuffing the form letter into the SASE and mailing it out, and the writer no longer fears the mailman.

When writers start out, they have no sense of their own importance in the writer/agent equation. The try to break in on bended knee, hoping someone will rep them.

Read Dale Carnegie if you believe that's the right way to do business.

Newbie writers need to have confidence. Not cockiness —that's bad. They need to believe in themselves. Trust themselves. Feel good about themselves.

I have a writing friend who doesn't call himself a writer. On his taxes, under occupation, he put "rejection collector."

Don't be a rejection collector. Be confident.

Don't be a frightened mouse who is terrified to ever bend the rules. Be a trend setter.

Don't be a sycophant. Be a leader.

Don't be afraid. Be bold.

Don't ever rely on any one person for your answers. Seek for yourself.

Double checking for typos, using 24# paper, and leaving out the SASE all have less to do with breaking into publishing than they have to do with adopting the right attitude toward publishing.

Hope is for the lottery. Winners don't need to hope.

And they don't need form letter rejections.

76 comments

Pitching To Agents

So you wrote a book that is a surefire bestseller, you know all about queries and the submission process, and you're ready to begin marketing to agents to find representation. Then you hear some exciting news: a healthy specimen of the family Agentus Literarius (Literary Agent) is coming to town near you to speak and take pitch meetings.

You're excited. Surely, meeting an agent and pitching your book in person is more effective than going the unsolicited slush pile route. This is your chance to make an impression, stick in the agent's mind, and most of all, get an immediate response.

There's only one problem... how the heck do you verbally pitch a book?

When talking to an agent, you have a single goal: convince her to take a look at your book or book proposal. She isn't going to accept you as a client until she's read the book, so there isn't any reason to speak for longer than a few minutes. In fact, a verbal book pitch shouldn't last more than 60 seconds. That's the time an agent spends pitching a book to publishers, and you need to be able to do the same.

Here's a sample verbal pitch:

My novel, DISTURB, is a medical thriller in the same vein as Michael Palmer and Robin Cook.

It's about the pharmaceutical breakthrough of the millennium. DruTech Industries proudly presents N-SOM, a pill that completely replaces eight hours of sleep. Feel totally refreshed, both physically and mentally, in just fifteen minutes a night.

The profit potential is boundless. Mankind's productivity will go through the roof. One third of a person's life could be recovered, for only ten dollars a dose.

The FDA sends CDER agent Dr. Bill May to green light N-SOM for American use. The pressure, both political and monetary, is tremendous. But Bill soon harbors fears that N-SOM may not be as safe as early reports indicate...

After meeting the brilliant inventor Dr. Nikos Stefanopolous and his beautiful daughter Theena, Bill stumbles into an insidious cover-up that hinges on Emmanuel Tibbets, a human guinea pig who hasn't had a fink of sleep in over fifty days.

Bill's investigation soon unearths a snarled tangle of extortion, conspiracy, taboo sex, hidden secrets, and murderous betrayal.

When N-SOM's deadly side-effects are revealed, along with the shocking truth of how the drug is produced, Bill and Theena find themselves on the run from hired assassins, three letter government agencies, and a breed of psychopath unlike any ever known.

Billions of dollars, and billions of lives, are at stake. Can Bill and Theena survive long enough to expose the truth? Or will the world succumb to an evil that may bring about the extinction of mankind?

DISTURB by J.A. Konrath
You will never have a good night's sleep again.

I started the pitch by stating the genre, and comparing the book to the known leaders in that genre. Then I dive right into the hook, quickly explain the characters and the central conflict, and end with a bang and a tagline.

As you can see, I don't get heavily into plot details, minor characters, or scene-by-scene descriptions. Let the writing sell the writing. Your job in a verbal pitch is to get the agent interested in taking a look at your project.

If the agent liked the idea, I'd hand her my four page unconventional query submission (as explained in my pdf download **How to Find an Agent and $ell Your Writing Booklet**). Then I'd let her know the book is complete (if it is complete–if not, I'd tell her when it will be finished), and ask if she's interested in seeing the first three chapters.

If she is, I'd offer to hand her the sample chapters right there, or if it would be easier to mail them to her office. Don't try to hand her the complete manuscript unless she specifically asks for it.

If you do get permission to send the agent sample chapters (or the whole manuscript), write REQUESTED MATERIAL in big letters on the envelope or box, and include a query letter reminding the agent where you met her and what your pitch was about.

It goes without saying that anything you give the agent should be exciting, flawless, and wonderfully written.

If the agent isn't interested in the manuscript, or seems lukewarm about the idea, don't try to turn a no into a yes. No means no. Rather than argue and act unprofessional, bury your disappointment and use this opportunity to ask the agent what you can do into order to get a yes next time. Ask for advice, tips, and pointers on what you could have done differently.

Then ask, if you specifically follow her suggestions, could you send her a revision?

Pitching Tips

- Dress well. Not only does it create a good impression, you'll feel better if you look better.
- Maintain eye contact, and try to pitch from memory rather than read off a sheet of paper–extemporaneous speech is more engaging than reading aloud.
- Be upbeat, animated, and enthusiastic. Smile. You're selling an idea; be excited about it.
- Be polite and gracious.
- Be brief.

- Say thank you, whether you get a yes or a no.

Chances are you'll be nervous before the meeting. This is normal. Your best weapon against nerves is preparation. Practice your pitch beforehand —in front of a mirror, in front of your mom, in front of the cat. Practice until you know it forwards and backwards.

If you blow the pitch, don't get discouraged. Verbal pitching isn't easy. It also isn't necessary to land an agent. Try to learn from your mistakes for the next time, or stick with written query letters.

A Warning

There are people on the fringe of the publishing world who call themselves agents, but really aren't. These folks prey on new writers by asking for money in the form of reading fees, representation fees, critique fees, book-doctoring, promotional fees, or editing services.

The bottom line is:

NEVER GIVE AN AGENT MONEY!

Agents should make their money by selling a client's work, and that's all. Standard commission is 15%, which is taken from the checks they mail you. You should never have to mail them a check for anything.

If an agent wants to represent you, and their service requires any kind of up-front fee, walk away. Anyone can claim to be an agent. No license or special training is required. Research the agent before you send to them.

If you do get an agent interested in your book, be genuine. Be grateful. Be excited. This is awesome. You should be celebrating big-time. Drinks on you, baby!

Then think about what questions you want to ask the agent. There is a great list of questions to ask at the **Association of Author's Representatives Website.** Here are a few:

- Who have you sold? Can you put me in touch with some of your authors?
- What do you think needs to be improved in the books? Revised? Tweaked? Edited?
- Do you have editors in mind for these books? What's your selling plan? Have you sold books similar to these?
- What can I expect, in terms of timeframe to sell this?
- Will I get copies of my rejection letters? Will I be kept in the loop —who has the manuscript, when you expect to hear from them, etc?
- What can I do to make your job easier?
- What happens if you can't sell these books? Would you like to still retain me as a client, and see more work from me?
- Does your agency deal with subsidiary rights? What are they, exactly?

- What is it about my work that you like? That you don't like?
- Do you have an agency contract?
- Do you give a 1099 tax form at the end of the year?

They also have a free service that lets you look up agents to see if they are an AAR member (the AAR doesn't allow fee-charging agents in their organization.) Keep in mind that the site is rarely updated, so even if an agent isn't listed on the site as an AAR member, she still might be one. Ask.

The agent should also be able to give you a list recently published titles, happy clients, and be able to put you in touch with authors that can supply a reference.

It goes without saying that you shouldn't bug an agent with these questions until they've asked to take on your project. And it's perfectly acceptable to tell an offering agent, "This is a big decision, I need a few days to think about it." Which will give you time to check her references, and call other interested agents and let them know you have another offer... that should light a fire under their butts to read you quick.

Beggars can, and should, be choosers. A bad agent is worse than none at all (and I know this for a fact, because I had a bad agent), so you owe it to yourself to find one you're compatible with.

In my opinion, here's the MINIMUM an agent should do:

1. Return your calls and emails within a few days.
2. Let you know which publishers have the manuscript.
3. Give you copies of rejection letters from publishers.
4. Submit manuscripts within a few weeks of accepting them.

Good agents also:

1. Keep in touch with you on a regular basis (at least once a month)
2. Tell you what they like and don't like about your writing, and offer suggestions.
3. Have a plan on who to submit the book to.
4. Actively take an interest in your career, what you're currently doing, what you plan on doing next, and offer advice.

Rejection

"The Days"

Let the days stand up
In a single file line
for close inspection

The time has come, my friends
for some serious reflection
on the way innocence ends.

Life fluttered down
like drooling bats
and fed
upon my hope.

My youthful dreams
(or so it seems)
were spontaneously born
to their ever-present state
like the facade of a never ending wall...

One by one I've watched bricks fall.

Faster than I could replace them
Much to fast to even chase them
Too many to count
An ugly amount
My wall became a pile.

Let this be a message sent
Hope is not a good cement.

And so I screamed
at the great mess
Screamed while time slowly
progressed
As time usually does
Burying what never was.

And then I sat
Upon my pile
And cried
For more than quite a while
My dreams had died
Were buried under bricks and bricks and bricks...

A gravesite for the non-essential
The tombstone read "He had potential."

I sat and sat
and found the hours
were possessed
with magic powers
For they'd turned into weeks.

And when
I finally led my feet
and head to leave
behind the dead
I stumbled into
troubled sleep
leaving brick-dreams far away —
Then I opened my eyes and it was today.

Now how should I continue?

Should I rage against my yesterdays?
Stoke the fire with my hands?
Refight all my private wars
with indignation in command?

Should I pull the stitches
on old wounds
to see if they are healed?

The problem is not mine alone
though selfish I may sometimes be
Impotence is universal
not exclusive to me.

So...
Inspect the days with a jeweler's loupe
Select and keep the precious few
Reject the ones that drip with pain
Elect to have no more that do
Reflect on those that still remain
For those make up the meat of time.
Life in neither good nor bad
Homogenous the paradigm.

And when the shadows of depression
Lead you to your next couch session
Unlock the door before you leave —

You'll back, for this is not
the end of time
as some believe.

Armageddon's far away...
This is simply New Years Eve.

"The Days" was written by me after one of my many hard rejections in the publishing biz (success was almost within reach, and then the world collapsed. This has happened more times than I like to think about.) It takes a lot of guts to send out stories to editors and agents. After a dozen form letter rejections by industry pros, most of us really start to question our talent. If I was good enough, I'd be published, right? Er... well... kind of.

In order to be published, you have to be able to tell a good story with as wide of an appeal as possible, and do it in a way that is both creative and entertaining, while conforming to a few certain absolutes concerning style and structure. So, yes, being able to do this (if you want to call this talent), plays a large part in if your work is accepted or not. But it's entirely possible that you can do all of this, and still get rejected.

Many writers, myself included, have many tales about 'almost making it', just to have unknown Factor X come in and poo-poo all over our parades. Factor X can come in a myriad of disguises; bad agents, agents who quit, publishers who don't care, editors who changes houses, scams, your book is behind the trend, your book is ahead of the trend, your book defies genres, publishers who go out of business, POD and vanity publishers, last minute change of minds, pros who promise the world and deliver nothing — and all of these are ones we've actually experienced. I'm sure Factor X has many other faces as well.

So, even if you do EVERYTHING right, you may still fail. Which is a huge blow to the ego.

When it happens a couple of times, you begin to question the reason you wanted to write in the first place. Am I a masochist? Why doesn't someone just tell me the honest truth — that I suck and I'll never get published?

Well, part of the problem is that many of us still treat publication like winning the lottery. It's a one in a million dream. Querying an agent is akin to buying a lotto ticket at the Supermart. The smarter way to look at it is by using this simple syllogism:

There have been books published that aren't very good.

I'm positive I can write better than some of the published books I've read.

It is inevitable, if I keep trying, that someday I'll be published.

Why can everyone name a few dozen books that were lousy? These lousy books somehow got through the system. They bypassed rejection. Many of them are even first books by new authors. So what is their secret? Determination and persistence. If you keep digging holes in your back yard, you'll eventually hit oil. It may be ten miles down, but it's there. You just need to keep trying.

I've gotten over 400 rejections, and I still get them every week. Do you know what's worse? Not getting a single rejection, because you've never tried.

Don't be the person who never tries. The things worthwhile in life are the things worth fighting for.

Rights & Contracts

Rights are often talked about, but what exactly are they?

When you write something, you don't sell the writing itself. You're actually licensing people to print, adapt, translate, or perform the work. These rights may be for a fixed amount of time, such as two years, one-time-only, first printing, first US rights, first English speaking rights, etc. They may also be until the work goes out of print, which is how most publishers operate.

Hyperion bought world rights to the first six books in the Jack Dnaiels series. This is how it is worded in my contract:

"Author grants and assigns to Publisher the sole and exclusive rights to the Material throughout the world during the entire term of the copyright and any renewlas and extensions thereof: to print, publish and istribute the Material inbook form, including hardcover, trade paperback and mass market paperback, in all languages."

What does this mean? A copyright lasts for an author's entire life, plus 70 years. Quick note for newbies; don't worry about getting a copyright. You DO NOT need to register for a copyright at the US copyright office. Save your stamps and money. Your publisher will do this for you. Being paranoid about idea-theft is the earmark of an amateur.

So does my contract state that I can never leave my publisher until I've been dead for 70 years?

No. Because there is also this clause:

"If a Book of the Work is out-of-print (definition of "out-of-print" omitted for length), all rights granted to the Publisher shall automatically revert to the author."

Which says that if my publisher stops printing my book, the rights are mine again, to do with as I please.

Hyperion has world translatation rights, but several other subsidiary rights were kept by me. Though Hyperion can sell the book to Thailand, they cannot sell the book to Hollywood, or make an audiobook from it.

The contract discusses various other rights (periodical, book club, mulitmedia, etc.) and the percentage split between author/publisher.

For example, if the publisher sells first serial rights (printing a portion of the book in a periodical before it is published), I get 90% of the money, they get 10%. Second serial rights is a 50/50 split.

My 90% of the money for first serial rights is subtracted from my advance if I haven't earned out, or is added to my royalty check if I have earned out my advance.

Though Hyperion has world rights, they only have 25% of them (20% for British). That means if they sell Whiskey Sour to England for ten grand, Hyperion earns two grand, and I earn eight grand, which goes toward my advance.

I write about advances and royalties in the TIPS section of my website, if some of you are confused about what I'm talking about.

It's in the author's best interest to keep as many rights as possible, to sell them, and its int he publisher's best interest to keep as many rights as possible, to earn back what they've paid the author.

My agent has sold the audiobook sub rights to Brilliance audio. This contract is seperate from Hyperion, and my print publisher doesn't earn anything from it.

My agent hasn't sold movie rights yet, but if they do, Hyperion doesn't get a cut. Hyperion will benefit though, from increased sales and a new edition of the book.

Of course, we all know that the most lucrative sub rights ever sold were Tom Clancy's Hunt for Red October. Get it? Sub rights?

So what else is in a publishing contract? Here's the breakdown:

1. Clause on when the manuscript(s) will be delivered.

2. Grant of rights. What rights they are buying.

3. Editorial changes and proofs. These state that the editor has the right to request changes, but won't change anything without author approval.

4. Advance. How the money will be paid out. In my case, I get chunks when turning in outlines and finished manuscripts.

5. Royalties. What I earn per book sold. For hardcover 10% of cover price for first 5000 sold, then 12.5% for next 5000, and 15% for everything over 10,000. For paperbacks, 8% of cover price.

6. Sub rights. What is the payment for other rights they're buying? Examples are: Book club (50% to author), e-books (50% to author), foreign rights (75% to author).

7. Transactions with affiliates. My publisher's parent company can exercise the sub rights.

8. Royalty statements. This defines the terms of joint accounting —when an advance isn't earned out until all books in the contract earn out, reserve against returns —keeping money from the author in case bookstores return books, and when royalty statements are issued.

9. Examination of Publisher's Books and Records. The author has the right to look at the numbers.

10. Termination. All the things that can break the contract, including failure for an author to deliver an acceptable manuscript.

11. Publication. The time frame in which a publisher goes to press after accepting a book, and how many free copies an author and agent receive.

12. Warranties and Indemnities. The author swears he wrote the book, and is responsible for the content.

13. Competing works. The author won't publish anything similar with anyone else while the contract is in force.

14. Copyright. The publisher will pay for it.

15. Third party infringement. Both the publisher and author can sue copyright infringers.

16. Option. The publisher gets first look at the author's next manuscript.

17. Out of print termination. Rights revert back to author when book is out of print.

18. Retention of manuscript copy. It's the author's responsibilty to keep a copy of the book.

19. Use of author's name and likeness. The publisher can use the author for promo stuff.

20. Advertisements. Any sub rights licensed cannot have any advertising in them unless the author agrees.

21. Taxes. The publisher doesn't withhold them.

22. Force majeure. Acts of god can change the contract.

23. Bankruptcy. If the publisher files for bankrupt, the contract is null.

24. Governing law. The contract is subject to the laws of NY.

25. Assignment of this agreement. Neither author nor publisher can assign this contract to anyone else unless both agree.

26. Headings. The headings inthis agreement are for convenience only and are without substantive effect.

27. Notices. First class mail is used for correspondence between author and publisher, but registered mail is used in certain cases.

28. Agency. The author allows the agent to represent him in this deal.

29. Sodomy. Ha! Just seeing if you were still paying attention!

29. Entire understanding. This contract supersedes all prior negotiations.

So that's a book contract. Not very exciting, huh? As always, I'm happy to answer any questions, as long as you sign this simple agreement...

The Truth About Publishers

You've been hearing it for years: Once you're published, your publisher won't help you market or promote. After the ink on the contract dries, you're on your own, left to sell your books with zero help from the folks who just plunked down big bucks to publish it.

Is this true? Are the dispirited moans of authors at the convention bar —-claiming they remain midlist because they were never 'pushed' onto the bestseller list —-based on hard evidence?

Here's what I know, based on my experience.

THINGS YOUR PUBLISHER WILL (PROBABLY) DO FOR YOU

1. Print up advance reading copies (ARCs)
2. Send these ARCs to reviewers
3. Write a press release and send it out
4. Have in-house meetings with marketing and sales to brainstorm hooks for your book
5. Assign a publicist to you
6. Allocate a marketing budget to your book
7. Place you in their catalogue(s)
8. Attempt to sell the subsidiary rights they've attained
9. Edit your book
10. Ask you to complete an author questionnaire
11. Help you set up some book signings
12. Talk about your book to buyers and solicit orders
13. Get your books into the hands of distributors and onto bookstore shelves and online stores

Depending on the size of your publishing house, the above list is usually the bare minimum they'll do. And chances are you won't ever know how much they've actually done, because you may not get to see most of it.

If you want to be involved, volunteer. I wrote my own press release and catalogue copy. I've set up my own booksignings. My contacts led to a Korean rights sales. I send out many ARCs to reviewers on my own dime.

THINGS YOUR PUBLISHER MIGHT DO FOR YOU

Hyperion and Brilliance Audio did all of these things for me

1. Take out ads (about ten so far)
2. Print flyers (several hundred)
3. Print coasters/bookmarks (20,000)
4. Print business cards (1500)

5. Invite you to events (BEA, GLBA, UBA, etc)
6. Have a booklaunch party
7. Send you on tour
8. Hire a media coach
9. Send extra things to bookstores (coasters and drink mix)
10. Provide you with extra ARCs (a few hundred)
11. Listen and act on your marketing ideas
12. Take you out to dinner
13. Get you on local radio and TV (I've been on radio a few times)
14. Get you interviews
15. Give away free copies of your books (over a thousand)
16. Hold contests
17. Involve you with various promotions
18. Pay co-op to bookstores for displays and prime placement
19. Solicit your input on the cover and jacket copy (I wrote mine)
20. Work with you on the final product (every year I visit Brilliance Audio and lend my voice to their recordings of my books.)

Do publishers treat every author the same? No. A lot depends on their budget. But even more depends on the author. Is this an author who is actively trying to augment their efforts? Someone who is enthusiastic about promotion? Someone who works hard and offers ideas?

If I sat on my duff and whined about not getting enough attention, chances are I'd be ignored. No one wants to work with a prima donna, or an artiste. But I've found that EVERY SINGLE TIME I spend time and money trying to promote myself, my publishers are there to back me up.

THINGS YOUR PUBLISHER WON'T DO FOR YOU

1. Get you on the NYT Bestseller list. If they could, every book printed would be a bestseller.
2. Get you on Oprah, Good Morning America, etc. Unless you're a celebrity.
3. Take out a lot of ads. Ads don't sell books for unknown authors (have you ever bought a book because you saw an ad?) Ads are best used to announce a new book from an author with a huge fanbase.
4. Send you on a huge tour. Tours don't make money. Ever. They are for author egos, building bookseller relationships, and meeting fans, more than selling huge numbers of books.
5. Be in constant touch with you. Authors who don't need constant reassurance get more attention than needy authors.
6. Sell your book. A publisher can get bookstores to carry your titles, but they can't make customers buy them. Only one person can do that (hint: you)

Your publisher is your partner. Like a marriage, making demands won't help the love grow. But giving, listening, and actively trying to make your partner happy will be mutually beneficial.

Which brings up the next list, one that new authors (and even many pros) don't ever consider.

THINGS YOU SHOULD DO FOR YOUR PUBLISHER

1. Make deadlines
2. Be courteous, considerate, and enthusiastic
3. Be accessible
4. Show them your desire to help
5. Self-promote by going to conventions, doing book-signings, speaking at libraries, soliciting interviews, maintaining a website, sending a newsletter, and all the other things I preach about
6. Be thankful
7. Make them money

In fact, the most important thing you can do in your career is make money for your publisher.

Big advances are nice, but it's hard to earn them out. But if you are earning out your advance, it's a good indicator that your publisher is making a profit, which only happens with 1 out of 5 books.

If they make money, you make money.

So what have you done for your publisher lately?

Working With A Publicist

If you're published by a large house, chances are you've been assigned a publicist. Some of them are helpful, informative, experienced, eager, and a joy to work with.

Others aren't.

I have author friends who love their publicists, and other who don't even know they have publicists because their calls are never returned.

As a writer, it's your job to work help your publicist help you. That means you must keep her informed about everything you're doing to promote yourself, stay receptive, gracious, enthusiastic, and appreciative, and never be pushy, demanding, or ungrateful.

A publicist is the one who sets up booksignings and tours, sends out the press release, makes sure your galleys go to the appropriate reviewers and bookstores, and tries to book media events for you.

Don't be surprised if you don't get any signings or media events, and if you never hear about the press release or galleys. Chances are, your publicist has many authors that she's doing all of this for, and her boss will make her devote most of her time to the bestselling authors, not you.

Help her out by giving her a list of folks to send galleys to, writing your own press release, exhaustively filling out your Publisher Author Questionnaire, and booking your own signings.

Authors often ask me if it's a good idea to hire an outside publicist. I've never done so, and my feelings about this are mixed. Some of my friends love them, but they're expensive, and they really can't do much that you can't do yourself, other than book you on radio and maybe TV.

Have you ever bought a book because you heard the author on the radio? Me neither, so I don't believe paying someone $500 to get you on the AM hit "Good Morning Sheboygan" is worth it, considering you'd have to sell about 160 hardcovers or 830 paperbacks to break even with royalties.

If you do have a chance to do radio, or TV, jump at it. But keep in mind that simply being an author isn't newsworthy. You need to have a hook other than "I wrote a book."

If you've ever worked for the media, you know that hooks and spin are all that count. A publicist can help you do this, but unless your dad was the Black Dahlia Killer, it's unlikely you'll appear on any big shows.

That said, you can still help your publicist sell you to the media, by completing the Publishing Questionnaire that they supply you with, and assisting in writing a Press Release.

If you'd like to see samples, here's the **PRESS RELEASE** I wrote for Whiskey Sour, and here's my **QUESTIONNAIRE** for Bloody Mary. You can also download a **SALES BROCHURE** I created for

Whiskey Sour before the book came out, to hand out to libraries and at conventions, and the **REVIEW BROCHURE** that I made after it came out, to hand out at booksignings.

For the release of Bloody Mary, my publisher created an ad for me that I also use as a flyer. **HYPERION AD.**
Your ultimate goal is to become a brand, just like Pepsi or Nike. To do this, you need to get your name and your books out there, for the public to see.

It's hard. Very hard. Writing a good book simply isn't enough. But you can influence your sales, by doing some of these techniques. And if you have a marketing or promotional idea that really worked for you, I'd love to hear it.

Email me. We'll talk.

Money Money Money

Every profession has salary differences.

I have a friend in a management position in a non-writing job, and he knew the man who held the position prior to him, and how much he made.

They offered him 10k less.

He was angry. After all, he was doing the same job, and was even more qualified. But he took the job regardless, because it was a promotion, and he didn't want to let an opportunity pass him by.

Ten grand is a lot of money, but that number is nothing compared to the differences that writers get paid.

The average advance for a novel is five thousand bucks, and has been for as long as I've heard statistics being bandied around. This average includes all of the micro presses who don't offer advances, along with the megabestsellers who make seven figures per book.

I've also heard other stats.

- Only a few hundred people in the world make their sole income writing fiction.
- Once you're in a "salary bracket" you can be stuck there for book after book unless your sales explode —-or your sales plummit
- Only 1 out of 5 books earn out their advance and pay royalties.
- Bigger advances (generally) mean more support in-house.
- Advances can vary wildly (as much as 1000%) within the same imprint.

No writer gets into this business for the money, because the money isn't good. There's a business rule called *The 20% of the 20%* (or something similar). It states:

The top twenty percent in any profession makes as much money as the other eighty percent. And of that twenty percent, the top twenty percent makes as much as the other eighty percent. And so on.

That's why Stephen King makes six million per book, and you make five thousand. Welcome to the Arts.

So what does this mean to you, the writer?

At first, it means nothing. You write for the joy of writing, and publication is its own reward.

I used to think, "All I want is to see my name in print, then I'll be happy."

And it did make me happy. It still does. But now, all I want is to be able to stop living off credit cards, stop spending so much money self-promoting, stop devoting 90% of my time to the business end of this career rather than the writing end of this career. And a Porsche. Or even a used Mustang.

Once you're published, you're going to want (in no particular order) more money, a bigger print run, movie deals, more publicity, more advertising, a tour, cover input, etc.

The more money you're paid, the more money the publisher has to spend to make sure they don't lose out on their investment. You want the big advance, because it shows that your publisher is behind you.

But beware the other end of the spectrum; big advance, big promotional campaign, and poor sales. That will likely be the last big advance you ever get.

So what does the writer need to do?

1. Your main goal is to make the same amout or more as your last deal.
2. To make the same amount or more, be prepared to spend a lot of your advance on self-promotion.
3. Make sure you earn out your advance. You can, with hustle.
4. Don't expect jumps in salary that aren't justified by sales.
5. Don't expect to write full time unless you have a spouse who works or you know how to budget your money.
6. Don't think that money isn't important; it's VERY important. Publishing is a business, and it's all about the red and the black.
7. Writers don't normally discuss money with each other. If you do find out that one of your peers is making ten times what you are making (or ten times less) avoid the envy or the gloating. Your competition isn't with your fellow writers; it is with yourself.
8. Get a good accountant.
9. Don't expect instant returns on your self-promotion investment. It's not like day trading, where you can spend $300 on a conference and expect to sell 100 books to make your money back. This is more like buying mutual funds that will grow years from now. If you want to reap, you have to sow.

35 comments

Show Me The Money

All writers are rich, right?

Wrong. The average advance for a first book is $5000, and more often than not the publisher still loses money on the deal. More people make their living playing Major League Baseball than writing fiction.

Most writers get into this business with little or no knowledge of how the money end works. Here's a fast and dirty explanation, beginning with some definitions.

- **Sales -** The actual number of books that are sold. Publishers frequently inflate or reduce the actual number. For the most accurate sales figures, subscribe to **WWW.THEBOOKSTANDARD.COM.**
- **Royalties -** The amount of money an author makes off of each sale. A standard hardcover contract will offer the author 10% royalty off the cover price for the first 5000 sold, 12.5% for the next 5000 sold, and 15% for everything over 10,000 copies sold. If your publisher has world rights, and sells those rights to another country, you typically split the royalties 50/50 with your publisher. So every hardcover Australian copy of your book will net you 5% for the first 5000. For mass market paperbacks, the royalty is 6% of the cover price. it may go up to 8% if you have escalators in your contract (so many hundred thousand sold). There are also escalators for appearing on the NYT bestseller list.
- **Advance -** Royalty money an author gets before the book is published. An advance does not need to be repaid if it isn't earned out.
- **Earn Out -** When the author makes enough in royalties to cover their advance. Once your advance is earned out, the publisher cuts you a check several times a year. If you had a $1000 advance, you'd have to sell 500 copies of a $20 hardcover (at 10% royalty rate) in order to earn out.
- **Sell-through -** Books sold versus books printed. The average sell-through is 50%. New authors may have slightly less. The books that don't sell are stripped or remaindered.
- **Remainders -** If you've ever bought a new hardcover at the store for $3.99, the book was remaindered. When a book is remaindered, it is sold at cost to a wholesaler, warehouse, distributor, jobber, private party, etc, and neither the publisher nor the author earn royalties on it. Paperback books are stripped —-they have the cover ripped off and are thrown away.
- **Rights -** As the author, you automatically own the copyright to whatever you write (no need to file that US Copyright form). You don't sell your actual writing, you sell rights to use the writing: first American rights, world rights, TV rights, movie rights, audio rights, etc. Different rights offer different royalty rates.

So what does all of this mean to you, the writer?

It's important to know that a publisher profits about as much as an author does per book (about $3 on a hardcover, 70 cents on a paperback).

Your goal is to earn out you advance —-earning out your advance is a good indicator that your book is making money for the publisher. And above all else, **you want to make money for your publisher!** If you don't, your publisher won't buy your next book.

You should always have a case of books on you, in your car. You never know who you'll run into for a quick sale or quick give-away, and you'll never know if the bookstore you're signing at will have enough copies, if any.

Buying books directly from your publisher doesn't count toward royalties (you don't earn any money from that sale). So to get copies for yourself, you should become friends with a local bookstore and ask them if they can sell you copies of your own book at cost (usually a 40% discount). That way you get the royalty.

Try to keep 20-30 copies on you all the time, and re-order when you're running low. Years from now you'll wish you had more.

If you're ever at a booksigning or event and the bookseller runs out of your books (it happens!), offer to sell your copies to her at the same 40% discount. Remember —you want booksellers to make money off of you. Then they'll keep hand-selling your books after you're gone. You NEVER want to compete with a bookseller.

Sometimes a bookstore that you supply with copies will cut you a check. Sometimes they'll order books and give them to you when they arrive. Either way, they're making the cash, you look like a hero, and everyone is happy.

When your book goes out of print (is remaindered), your publisher will unload the remaining copies at a steep discount (for a few bucks a hardcover). They'll give you the chance to buy some. Buy some... but not all.

It's good to stockpile copies for a future date; perhaps a few hundred. But you also don't want to corner the market on your own book. Remainders on bookshelves get bought by readers, and your book is your best form of advertising. You WANT those remainders out there, for people to buy,
even though you aren't making royalties off of them. The more copies out there, the better off you are.

I've bought remainders, gotten hooked on an author, and graduated to new releases. That's why used bookstores, Amazon used books, libraries, and discount stores are good things. The author may not see any money right away, but the more people who read you, the more likely you are to
sell greater numbers of your next book.

Remember that publishing is a business, and business is about the red and the black. **YOU MUST MAKE MONEY** if you want to stay in this business. That's why many of the authors I know spend a great deal of money (about 33% of their advance) and time (about 50% of their working time) on self-promotion and marketing.

Being Edited

I just got my edits back from my publisher, and it is taking me a few days to wrap my head around them.

The edits aren't major, but they do involve cutting some of my darlings —namely, jokes.

I HATE cutting humor. It's what makes my books different from most of the other thrillers out there.

But if humor gets in the way of the suspense, or of the story, then a cheap laugh isn't worth losing the suspension of disbelief.

That's what I'm trying to convince myself.

Being edited is very much like the stages of death. Let's recap:

1. Denial - This isn't my book that's been cut to pieces, and I can't really be expected to make these ridiculous changes.
2. Anger - How dare my editor think that this book is anything but pure gold? She's out of her mind.
3. Bargaining - Okay, I'll cut these two pages, but let me keep the dog poop reference.
4. Depression - I can't stand it, my book is being ruined. I can't face making these changes.
5. Acceptance - Fine. I did everything you asked. And it turns out you were right all along.

I'm just getting over the depression phase, and am trying to work my way through the suggestions.

For those who have never been professionally edited, here's how it works. You get your manuscript back covered with red ink, and are expected to attend to every detail. In some cases, the editor tells you how to fix it (punctuation, grammar). In other cases, she offers 'suggestions.' They aren't really suggestions —they're expectations —but she'll suggest solutions to the proposed changes.

The hard part is when one thread gets pulled and the whole blanket unravels. One change can effect the story globally, causing ramifications later in the book that also need to be changed, which causes more problems, and so on.

In DIRTY MARTINI I've been advised that there is too much action in the first two days of the story, and it should be extended to three days. But when I do that, it throws off the whole timeframe, and I need to juggle scenes, write new scenes, and rewrite a lot of stuff.

I'm doing it, but it isn't a quick fix (like cutting jokes —but that really isn't a quick fix either because I languish over each cut.)

I'm sure I'll be thrilled with the end result —I always am. But plastic surgery is always painful, even if you look better after it is over.

So, I'm through whining, and I'm going to get these changes done right now.

Well, maybe one more day of whining first...

31 comments

The Best Kind of Marketing

Attending conferences. Buying ads. Passing out flyers, bookmarks, and postcards. Speaking at libraries. Doing signings. Attending conferences. All of these help a writer build name-recognition.

But the best form of self promotion is one that many writers don't actively pursue. You can reach millions of demographically targeted fans, and impress them greatly. It's possible to establish a fan base before your novel is even published.

And best of all, it's free, or you get paid for it.

Sell short stories.

Ellery Queen and Alfred Hitchcock have circulations of 250k each. The Strand Magazine is 50k. (I've been in all of them, some several times)

www.Amazon.com/shorts is viewed by millions (my story should be up in a day or two.)

Anthologies range in circ from 5k to 200k (the new THRILLER anthology edited by James Patterson will be out in May and received the biggest advance ever paid for an antho —-I'm in it.)

I've done several Writer's Digest articles, and have appeared several times in Crimespree (very big market for the mystery world.)

Also, in the past two years, I've appeared in Cemetery Dance, Horror Garage, Horror Express, Apex, Surreal, The Many Faces of Van Helsing, Spooks, Cold Flesh, Small Bites, FMAM, Requiem for a Radioactive Monkey, and on over a dozen websites (another reason to get your own website up ASAP, so people can link to you.

I currently have ten stories on submission, and eight stories scheduled for publication within the next six months.

This amounts to several million people reading my writing. If they like it, some will seek out my books.

You won't get rich writing shorts. Many pay in contributors copies. The high end markets pay between $250 and $1200. But this isn't about money. It's about exposure.

Your query letter should be the essence of simplicity.

"My name is JA Konrath. I've been published a few dozen times, and just signed a second three book deal for my Lt. Jack Daniels thriller series. Enclosed is a 1500 word short story for your consideration. Love the mag, hope to hear from you soon."

I always include a SASE. Why? Most magazines are labors of love. They barely cover costs. Help them out. You should also help them out by buying copies of the magazine you submit to, or getting subscriptions. This is essential anyway, so you can write a story geared specifically to certain periodicals. EQMM doesn't want the same thing as AHMM or FMAM or The Strand.

Always read the submission guidelines. They're mostly pretty standard, but occasionally the editors ask for special formats or extras (a bio, a picture, a bibliography.)

If you have no prior sales, here's the query you should use:

"My name is JA Konrath. I love your magazine. Enlcosed for your consideration is a 1500 word short called 'Editors are Gods.' Hope to hear from you soon."

That's all you need. Don't give them a synopsis of the story —-why should they read it if they already know what it's about? Keep it brief.

In your query heading include your address, phone number, email, website URL, and Social Security number (optional.)

In some cases, I don't even include a cover letter. The editor is smart enough know it's a submission. The story is what sells the story, not your query.

In other cases, I use an email query. Find out the submission format they prefer. Some like Word doc attachments, or txt, or rtf. Some like the submission in the body of the email, with no formatting other than paragraph breaks.

Many markets are tough to break into, but once you do break in, it gets easier and easier. The more you sell, the more you sell. And pretty soon, markets will approach you. I've had several invitations to submit, as well as several reprints that fell into my lap.

Don't know where to submit? Go to your local bookstore and check the periodicals. Buy some magazines. Read them. Write a kick ass story that the editor will find familiar, yet unique.

Much success!

31 comments

Writing Scams

In my previous post, I talked about how important validation is for writers. There are many reasons why.

Writing a book, even a bad book, is a big accomplishment. You spend months, or years, creating an entire universe. It's hard work, lonely, egotistical, empowering, magical, mysterious, fulfilling, and depressing. When you finally write THE END, few things in life compare with that feeling.

Naturally, you want others to recognize your efforts. Perhaps even pay you for them.

Most first books aren't very good. Because personal opinion plays a part, it is harder to judge the quality of good writing. Paint an apple that looks like an apple, and you will be considered a decent artist. Play a song on the piano without messing up, and you will be considered a good musician. Finishing a book does not mean you will be considered a good author.

Most first authors don't know this.

Rather than treat publishing like a business (as they should) some authors treat themselves like artists, and then look for a way to legitimize their efforts. Even neophyte writers know this means:

1. Getting an agent
2. Getting published

With most artistic endeavors, there is a learning curve. Writing has one as well, but it is harder to see.

I've written at length about how screwed up the publishing business is. But the business is a result of years of evolution and attrition. As problematic as it may be, it has become a way for writers to prove their worthiness as artists. It proves that there are no easy routes to getting an agent, or getting a book deal.

Authors that break in must meet some minimum requirements. They must tell competent, salable stories, based on the opinions of professionals who work within the industry.

It is hard to impress these professionals.

As such, since publishing became big-business, another type of big-business arose —validating the writer through alternative means.

A book is an intensely personal thing. Rejection is hard. Many new writers cannot get validated through the NY publishing scene, so they seek alternative methods.

Here are a few, and why they are bad.

FEE CHARGING AGENTS - An agent is someone who earns 15% of the rights sales she makes on behalf of a writer. Agents need no license, no degree, no training. Anyone can call herself an agent.

Getting a good agent is hard to do, because they have high standards. Even though they work for the writer, they have all of the control at the beginning of the relationship.

Some authors don't think that they have any choice in the matter —they're stuck with whatever agent accepts them. Read the writing tips on my website for more about good and bad agents.

When a cow is slaughtered, there is a lot of blood and extra bits and pieces that are of no use to the slaughterhouse. But this waste has spawned cottage industries that buy the offal and use it in pet food, fertilizer, and many other things.

This is what happened in publishing.

A bad agent can't stay in business —no sales means no money. But even bad agents were swamped by needy writers, begging to be represented. So the bad agents came up with a plan. They would charge the writers a small fee.

A struggling writer craving validation will happily pay $50 a month (supposedly for costs related to running an agency like Xeroxing, phone calls, messenger service) to have an agent.

Do the numbers. If a fee-charging agent has 100 clients, she's making $5000 a month for doing nothing.

How hard is she going to work to sell your book? Not very hard at all.

The bottom line: never pay an agent money. Visit "**Preditors and Editors**" "**Writer Beware**" and "**Association of Author's Representatives**" to find good agents and avoid bad ones.

WRITING CONTESTS - It's hard to publish short stories. There are only so many markets, and they tend to be picky.

Along came the contest. Pay $5, or $10, or $50 for a chance to win $500.

Do the numbers. If a 1000 authos pay $10 each, the person running the contest makes $10,000. They pay $500 to the winner, and pocket the rest.

The legitimate contests don't charge fees. And there's no guarantee winning the contest will do anything for your career. I could put in a query letter "I won the Randolf Award, the Zimmer Prize, and placed second in the Zamboni Fellowship" and the editor won't care.

The story is what matters, not the number of awards the writer has won.

If you have a good story, submit it to a paying market, or a contest that doesn't charge any fees.

PAID ANTHOLOGIES - Here's another quick scam. You submit a poem, and it gets accepted into an upcoming poetry collection. You get excited, tell all your friends and family, and then get a letter in the mail saying that you can purchase the anthology at $40.

Naturally you buy a copy, and so does Mom, and so does Aunt Grace and your best friend Phil. When you get the anthology, you see it is 700 pages long, and your wonderful poem is crammed on a page with seven others.

Do the numbers. If there are 3000 poems in the book, and each writer in the anthology bought at least one copy, the publisher made $120,000.

Poetry.com was infamous for this scam. They'd also invite writers to awards ceremonies, at staggering costs to the gullible writer, to receive a worthless award along with 1000 other 'winners.'

VANITY PRESS - In simple terms, a vanity press is a publisher whom the writer pays to get into print. Vanity presses often have contracts that hurt the writer (low royalties, excessive rights,) make false promises about distribution and sales, and deliver an inferior, high-priced product that you have to pay to warehouse and that you can't get into any bookstores.

A traditional press makes money through book sales. A vanity press makes money off the writer.

PRINT ON DEMAND - POD is a type of press that eliminates the warehouse fees by creating single copies of books to order, using a special photocopy/binding machine.

Some call it a technology, which it is. Some call it vanity, which is can be.

If there is a contract between the press and the author which requires the author to pay money and also discusses rights and royalties, it is a vanity press.

POD books are even more expensive that offset printed vanity books. They aren't returnable, and can't be distributed. They don't look, feel, or even smell the same as regular books. Like vanity presses, they aren't edited edited for content, and they publish anyone with enough money. There is no 'weeding out' process like there is in tradional publishing, and so many bad vanity books have been produced that there's a stigma associated with them —and the stigma is well-deserved.

Some well known POD vanity presses include Xlibris, PublishAmerica, iUniverse, and AuthorHouse. Avoid them.

Many writers want to self-publish. If that's your goal, hire a printer and learn about the business. Paying someone else, either POD or Vanity, to publish your work is a very bad idea.

Real publishers don't solicit authors. They don't send spam offering their services. They don't put ads in magazines. They don't mail you brochures. And they NEVER ask for money.

BOOK DOCTORS - After getting many rejections, a writer might begin to think her book isn't as good as she assumes. She'll want to make it better, but is unsure of how to do so.

Enter the freelance editor. Someone who charges a fee between $2 and $10 a page to 'fix' the book.

Some are legitimate, and can be helpful. Some are scammers who charge a few grand and make the book even worse. Like agents, there is no license, experience, or eduaction required to call yourself an editor.

My advice is to learn how to edit yourself. You should be able to do that anyway. But if you need a second opinion, and are willing to pay for it, get references. Know beforehand what you are paying for.

Some unscrupulous agents have worked with book doctors, selling them the addresses of the writers they have rejected. The rejected writer will receive a brochure in the mail, touting the book doctor's expertise.

Some bad agents will also refer writers directly to a book doctor, for a referral fee. Beware anyone asking you for money.

I have published author friends who successfully use freelance editors. I think your time and money are better spent learning the craft on your own. Take a class. Read books about editing. Join a writer's group.

If you really need a freelance editor, ask around. Getrecomendations from your peers. Don't pick one because they have a splashy ad in Writer's Digest.

SELF-PUBLISHING - I think self publishing is an option open to writers, but it involves a lot of time and effort, plus a lot of money. I'll defend self-publishing, but I do not recommend it —even though I know authors who have done it successfully.

Self-publishing is not vanity or POD publishing. A self-published author retains all rights, and doesn't share royalties with their printer. A self-published author creates their own imprint, gets their own ISBN, copyright, and Library of Congress ID, finds their own distributer, allows for returns, and knows up front the cost and effort going into their business.

I believe it is easier to find a traditional publisher than it is to successfully self-publish, and would recommend writing another book before trying to self-publish a book that has been rejected by traditional publishers.

THE BOTTOM LINE - Don't pay anyone any money for anything. If you do, do so knowing the risks involved. Education is your ally. Research is your friend. Ask questions. Seek answers. Trust your gut. If it seems too good to be true, it probably is.

The best things in life are the things that are earned, not handed to you. The harder you work for it, the sweeter success is when it arrives. Keep at it. Keep writing. Keep submitting. Never say die.

NY publishing is flawed. It's fallible. It wants to reject you. But it isn't an impossible nut to crack. Visit and sign up for **www.publisherslunch.com** and **www.pwweekly.com**. Each week there are new deals made with first time writers. It happens all the time.

The true secret to getting published is simple: Write a book that a complete stranger will pay $25 for.

52 comments

What I've Learned So Far

This is the age of instant communication, and because of that the author/reader relationship extends beyond the pages of a book. Authors spend a lot of time and money on websites, making it easy for fans to get in touch. Email, message boards, authors chats, blogs, and pod casts all make contacting your favorite writer practically instantaneous.

I believe that being approachable and accessible is necessary in this business, and I spend a good deal of time making sure I'm able to be reached, and that I reply to those who reach me.

My website took a great deal of time to set up. I used to update the content weekly, but now it's once a month, and mostly limited to appearances and news.

My blog is where I have a chance to air my thoughts about publishing, and I spend a lot of time here, posting and replying.

I run several contests, and the latest one just ended. It was a short story contest, and I had over a hundred entries, which thrills me.

Email is still the preferred method of contact, and I get between 30 and 50 emails a week from fans.

Snail mail is almost non-existent. I've gotten around ten fan letters in the past two years, compared to thousands of emails.

All told, I spend about ten hours a week connecting with fans. I feel it is time well spent.

But is there anything in my career which I don't consider worthwhile?

It is coming up on my three year anniversary —-three years ago, this November, I landed my first book deal. I went into this business green, and I know quite a lot now. Like all new authors, I had many misconceptions that were quickly dispelled.

Here are some things I've learned:

Write a good book. While this is a no brainier, so many new writers blame everyone but themselves for their lack of publication credits. If you want to succeed, you have to learn the craft.

Readers are more important than peers. When I first got published, it was incredibly important for me to be accepted by the mystery community. Now, not so much. I treasure the friends I've made, and will continue to make more, but I'm no longer worried about seeking approval.

Kiss ass. Start with the folks on your team —your agent and publisher. Then pucker up for booksellers, and fans. Be thankful, be gracious, and be vocal in both. If you're fun to work with, you're ahead of the game. If you spread warmth, it will be returned to you. Spreading venom has the same effect.

Give back. If you've had any degree of success, send the elevator back down. Talk to new writers. Offer advice. Teach. Give blurbs. Post publishing tips on your website.

Have a plan. Don't expect anyone to help you, guide you, or take care of you. Learn as much as you can, set goals, and figure out how to reach those goals.

Stay grounded. It's very easy to get caught up in the hype. Get real. You aren't curing cancer. You're an entertainer —don't think that you're more than that.

Don't volunteer. It's very easy to get used. I'm all for helping out within the writing and publishing community, but I've gotten burned a few times. Know what is in it for you, and be clear about what you're getting in return.

Don't compare yourself to other authors. Someone is always going to have more money, larger print runs, more fans, and better deals. Competition is healthy, but it should be with yourself, not with others.

Don't listen to reviews. You will anyway, but don't take it personally. Not everyone will like your books. Not everyone will like you. It isn't important what people are saying, as long as they're saying something.

Don't go to awards ceremonies. Losing isn't a big deal. What hurts is having fifty people come up to you and say, "Sorry you lost."

Be approachable. Both in person, and in cyberspace. If someone reaches out to you, reach back.

Learn to turn it off. I'm still struggling with this. Being a writer defines me as a person, and I can't seem to ever get away from it. I've had one vacation in three years, and during that vacation I did booksignings. Know when to relax. And when you learn how, teach me how.

Cherish family and friends. After you become a writer, there won't be many people who knew you 'before.' The ones who did are special. Never let them forget how special they are.

Don't worry. No matter how much you do, how hard you try, luck still plays a huge part in success. As Barry Eisler just told me, the most you can do is to try your best. Then, no matter how luck factors in, you'll at least have no regrets.

So far, I don't have any regrets. I wish the same to all of you.

22 comments

I'm Certain that I'm Uncertain

Nothing in life is certain, but few things are more uncertain than publishing.

A lot of stars have to align in order to become a successful author.

First off, you have to write a book. But that's not enough. It has to be a good book. But that's not enough. It has to be a good, *marketable* book. But that's not enough either. You have to write a good, marketable book that an agent will fall in love with. But that's still not enough. The agent has to make an editor fall in love with it, and the editor has to make the sales reps and the marketing department and her boss fall in love with it.

My sources tell me that happens about once in 13,000 times (I've blogged about this in my earlier BEA post.)

If you reach that stage, and your book is published, then the hard part begins. You have to get readers to discover your book and fall in love with it.

Writers and publishers have various ways of trying to make this happen. Advance reading copies, reviews, blurbs, ads, tours, library talks, conferences, signings, radio and TV interviews, awards nominations, widespread distribution, newspaper articles, movie options, foreign rights, websites, email campaigns, snail mail campaigns, co-op, discounting, catalogs, newsletters, and more.

No one is sure why some books sell and others flop. No one knows what works and what doesn't. People can't even agree on if a book is a good book.

If you're an author, trying to figure out your part in all of this, you can wind up a little overwhelmed.

Some authors just concentrate on writing they best book they can, and leave it up to fate to decide if it becomes successful.

Some authors spend a lot of time and money self-promoting, but even if they visited one bookstore a day for an entire year, and sold twenty copies of their book (a decent number) at each store, that's only 7300 copies a year, which won't get them on any bestseller lists.

How many books become bestsellers? Let's do some quick and dirty math to find out. The current top 15 NYT bestsellers in hardcover fiction have spent a total of 259 weeks on the List. If we average that, each book spends 17 weeks as a bestseller. That seems high, because of The Da Vinci Code and The Five People You Meet in Heaven (both over 91 weeks). If we remove them from the List, it seems to be the average bestseller is in the Top 15 for 4 weeks.

At 52 weeks in a year, there are 780 bestselling slots available (52 times 15 for the Top 15).

If we divide 780 slots by 4 (4 weeks for the average bestseller), that means there are roughly 195 hardcover novels that make the NYT Top 15 every year.

According to MJ Rose's blog, the top 12 NY publishers put out about 5100 fiction titles a year.

So, if you're the 1 in 13,000 that gets published, you still have to face odds of 1 in 26 to make the NYT Top 15 List.

Altogether, the odds are 338,000 to 1 that you'll write a bestseller.

Pretty daunting. And those odds are skewed because many of the folks on the NYT List have been on their previously. I'm sure it's much harder for a new author to crack the List.

I did an event with an award-winning and very popular author, whom I respect. He believes that writers are artists, and that the book is more important than the buzz. But he also understands the need for promotion, which he gladly does and is very good at.

Over a beer, he suggested that I stop worrying about what *could* happen and try to appreciate what *is* happening. Why drive myself crazy, when the future is largely out of my control? Shouldn't I appreciate the success I've already attained? I've sold a few books, been nominated for a few awards, gotten some decent reviews. Shouldn't that be enough? It's more than most writers ever have.

Another author at this event, one who has many books in print, is currently without a book contract. He believes that writers are craftsmen, and reminisced about being a young author, speaking to older pros without contracts, and swearing that it would never happen to him. But it has. Over a beer, he lamented his career, wondering what went wrong.

I couldn't help but think that a few years ago, when he was doing well, he hadn't been worrying about his career as much as he should have been.

I'd love to say that I'll be in this business for 30 years, and that someday I'll make the bestseller list. But all writers believe that. It's what keeps us going.

The numbers tell a different story. A discouraging story. Writers get dropped by publishers. They spend years in the business and never make the NYT List. They tirelessly self-promote and still have to keep their day jobs.

You can write a wonderful book, have a publisher that's behind you, get great reviews, win awards, do a lot of promotion, and still fail.

Scary thing, uncertainty. A very scary thing.

But today I'm going to take a little break from worrying. Hyperion just sold the Czech rights for my first two novels, and tonight I'm doing a reading in front of a crowd of friends.

I'll panic tomorrow.

4 comments

Potential

I have a writing friend who shall remain nameless, and we once had an agonizingly long discussion about potential.

I believe that if you set your mind to it, the sky is the limit. Success isn't about intelligence or talent —-it's about a refusal to give up. Recent studies have given my hypothesis some support: http://www.philly.com/mld/inquirer/news/magazine/daily/13689320.htm

My friend believes that your own potential is capped by your own personal limitations. A man with no legs will never win the world record for the long jump. A man with below average intelligence will never tie together Newtonian physics and quantum mechanics. No matter how hard they try. To coincide with that, if you're born into a privileged environment, you can become President even if you have below-average intelligence.

We reached a compromise of sorts. All a person can do is try to live up to their limitations. That might be enough to succeed in some things, and might not be enough to succeed in others. Luck always plays a part, but you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

So where does this leave writers? Is this a call to throw away your pens and stop trying? Or is it a call to work to your potential, because it may be enough to succeed? And how do you actually know what your potential is, and if it's enough to make it in this business?

Here's what I know:

1. Talent is inborn and unchangeable. But craft can be improved.
2. There are many paths to success.
3. You can improve your luck by working hard.
4. You'll sell more by getting out there than by staying at home.
5. Editors and agents consider talent and a book's merits, but they also consider craft and an author's merits.
6. You need to learn your limitations, and the only way to do that is by going past them.
7. Comparing yourself to others doesn't do anybody any good.

Can everyone who writes a book sell that book? Statistics tell us no. Will every book published become a hit? Again, no. Is it possible to become a number one bestselling author? Yes, but you have better odds becoming an Olympic medal winner.

Daunted? Don't be.

All huge goals are simply a series of smaller goals. The pyramids were built one stone at a time. A mountain is climbed one step at a time. A bestseller is sold one book at a time.

No matter your physical condition, if you want to run a marathon, there are things you can do to improve your chances of finishing. You can train every day. Buy the right equipment. Eat the right foods. Work out. Devote a lot of time to this pursuit. Recruit others to help you. Dedicate your life to it.

A lot of writers refuse to dedicate their life to pursuing success. Which is fine. They feel that many writers attain success without dedicating their life to it (see #7) so why should they?

No one is forcing you to work 80 hours a week. You don't have to learn to speak in public. You don't have to learn how to pitch. You don't have to visit bookstores and conventions. You don't have to get an agent. You don't have to improve your craft. You don't have to have a website or a blog. You don't have to do anything at all but write a book. And you might attain success by simply doing that.

But your chances improve if you do other things to reinforce that.

Fate is a future you didn't try to change. The people we admire in our society are the ones who succeeded despite the odds. The ones who faced adversity and won. The ones who picked themselves up by the bootstraps and went on to fame and fortune and glory.

Only you can decide what you must do in order to be a writer.

History will tell you whether you were right or wrong.

25 comments

Distribution

Many months ago, I pitched an idea to my publisher.

I did over a hundred 'drive-by' signings last year. I'd drop in a bookstore unannounced, meet the booksellers, and sign any copies of Whiskey Sour that they had on the shelves.

I met a lot of bookstore employees, and I'm pretty sure the books I signed and branded with the "Autographed Copy" sticker eventually sold, but all in all it wasn't the best use of my time and money. With gas prices today, driving a hundred miles to sign three copies of a book is a tad counter-productive.

Enthusiasm and idealism trump logic for first-time authors.

For Bloody Mary, I considered my alternatives.

I've often seen books at stores that were pre-signed by the author. The industry calls them tip sheets. An author gets a big stack of blank book pages, or a bunch of stickers, and these are placed in the books and shipped to the stores.

Collectors don't like them, because the author never handled the actual book. I'm not a huge fan of them either. I like the book to be signed on the title page, and the tip sheets are usually inserted at the very beginning, sometimes even using a different type of paper. It looks like the book was assembled, if that makes any sense.

So I asked Hyperion if, on my dime, I could visit the distibutor and sign books there.

A distributor is a company that warehouses books and ships orders to bookstores. Large publishers have their own distributors. There are also independent distributors like Ingram and Baker & Taylor. Distributors are essential to the publishing business. Even a small print run of five thousand copies takes up a lot of space.

Here's a way to visualize it. Ten copies of a hardcover fit into a box the size of a case of beer (and I'm sure all my readers can picture that.) Imagine 500 cartons of beer in your house.

Besides being a pleasant image, it's also a crowded one. Many rooms would be filled, floor to ceiling, with boxes.

Now picture a 20,000 print run (2000 cases of beer). Or a 100,000 print run (10,000 cases of beer).

Most publishers have multiple authors, and multiple books in print. Where can they store all of these books, and who will fulfill the orders?

Hence the distributor.

I thought I could use this central hub of activity as an advantage, and asked my publisher if I could visit the nearest warehouse.

A few months pass. Then my editor gets in touch and I can, in fact, visit the distributor.
Which I did, yesterday.

The Time Warner warehouse is located in Lebanon Indiana, three hours away from my house (three and a half hours when you get pulled over for going 80mph in a 55 zone). I got a warm welcome, met several of the wonderful (and highly efficient) staff, and spent four and a half hours signing 3000 copies of Bloody Mary.

I'm proud to say I used up every bit of ink in a new ballpoint pen.

The books were placed in boxes that had "Signed Copies" printed on the sides. We filled three large pallets worth, and spent much of the time singing classic rock songs. Well, I spent much of the time singing. The staff spent much of the time giggling at me —though they did join in when I broke into "Baby Got Back" by Sir Mix-A-Lot.

After the signing, I was treated to a tour of the warehouse.

It was big.

How big was it? Over a million square feet. Remember the last scene of Raiders of the Lost Ark, when the government flunky pushes the boxed Ark into a massive warehouse, stretching back as far as the eye can see?

This was bigger. And this wasn't a matte painting.

I was awed when I looked down a single row, which stretched back hundreds of meters, crammed with floor-to-fifty-foot ceiling stacks of books... and that was just The DaVinci Code aisle.

The place ran like clockwork. With less than two hundred employees, they shipped 500,000 books that day.

Orders came in, boxes were put on a Dr. Seussish conveyor-belt network that looked like a giant roller coaster, while human beings, assisted by computers, filled and dispatched thousands upon thousands of orders, from a fifty box shipment of The Lovely Bones to Barnes and Noble, to a seven book shipment of different titles to a small indie in Colorado.

I was greatly impressed, and the admiration turned to glee when I saw more than a few copies of Whiskey Sour being shuttled around.

Then came the shocker. The warehouse shipped 97 million books last year. And 20 million were returned.

Many of the returns were remaindered (which an author doesn't earn a dime on). Many were pulped. A giant grinding machine shredded books by the hundred.

I knew about remainders, and about stripped paperbacks that were thrown away by the bookstore. But I didn't have a clue about how many books are literally recycled.

Answer: lots.

That took a little wind out of my sails. With the staff, I'd made jokes about putting remainder stickers directly on the copies I was signing, to save time and shipping costs.

The jokes didn't seem very funny anymore.
The VP proudly exclaimed that the pulping machine paid for itself in the recycled paper it produced.

It produced a lot of paper.

Which reminds me... I better get back to work. I'm sure there's some self-promotion I need to be doing.

2 comments

Important Stuff: Disregard at Your Peril

For Newbies:

As a teacher, I see a lot of newbie writing. I also sometimes make myself available to new authors and critique their work (for free.) And I edited a book coming out this year called THESE GUNS FOR HIRE.

My point —I consider myself a pretty good editor.

But I never really understood what it is like to be an acquisitions editor, or an agent, until recently.

I'm a paid judge for a short story contest a magazine is holding, and I've had to read 2600 short stories.

I've learned a lot, much of it scary and bad. Namely: I can tell within ten seconds of looking at a story whether it will go on to the finals or not.

Ten freaking seconds.

This is not because I'm blessed with the ability to sniff out talent. It is not because I'm a pompous know-it-all who refuses to give anyone a chance. And it is not because I'm lazy and want to get this all over with quickly.

The writer tells me, subconsciously, whether or not their story is worth reading.

Did I say "worth reading?" Does that mean that as a *PAID JUDGE* I don't read every story cover to cover?

Shocking denouement: Yes. I don't read every story cover to cover. Sometimes I don't read past the first sentence.

And I know that if *I'm* doing this, so are professional agents and editors.

Have you ever thought that maybe the agent you submitted to didn't read your whole submission? You're probably correct.

And it is your fault why.

Here are some of the main reasons I disregard a manuscript. I'd bet good money that industry pros have the same criteria.

1. **Font.** Sound silly? It's not. Read for ten hours straight, then try to squint at some joker who crammed 1000 words on a page using 8pt Helvecta. You wanted to save paper and postage. I want to save my eyes. This gets the round file. Use 12pt Times New Roman or Courier. ALWAYS!!!!!

2. **Paper.** Cheap paper, thin paper, colored paper, multiple folds, stains of dubious origin, rips and tears, too many staples —-999 times out of 1000, if the paper is crummy, the story is crummy. But whenever I see 24# ultra white paper (go for 104 bright) I perk right up. Sound silly? It's not. Use good paper, no folds, one paperclip. Show me the work is important.

3. **Ink.** If it is dot matrix, or typewriter, or colored ink, or smeared ink, or ink that's running low, or has ballpoint pen or White Out ANYWHERE on it to make corrections, I can safely assume the story is bad. If you want to impress a date, wear expensive clothes. If you want to impress an editor, buy a decent printer.

4. **Spacing.** If I see big blocky paragraphs, more than 25 lines per page, no indenting, indenting 3 spaces or less (rather than 5), line spacing between paragraphs, or a story that begins on the first line of the first page rather than halfway down the first page, my subconscious says, "I don't want to read this" and my subconscious is usually right.

   These first four criteria should tell you that the way the story looks on a page is incredibly important. Did you ever go to a website that was so hard to read you didn't bother? It's the same thing with submissions. Make it look professional, or it won't even get read.

5. **Typos.** If I see a typo, grammar error, spelling mistake, or anything that says to me "The writer didn't proof read" it's in the round file. Sorry, but I have to read thousands more, and I can't waste my time. You obviously don't take this seriously, so why should I?

6. **First Sentence.** If you don't draw me in at the first sentence, and you made any of the above mistakes, you're rejected. If you have a lousy first sentence (usually describing the weather, or telling instead of showing, or something awkward and confusing) I *may* read on if you didn't make any other mistakes, but I'm always proven correct. I haven't picked *ANY* finalists that didn't grab me with the first sentence.

7. **Dialog.** So many submissions don't have any dialog. If there's no dialog, that's a good indicator the story is all telling, all exposition. Round file.

8. **Ending.** Shocking as these stats are, I completely read only 1 out of every 40 or 50 stories. Nothing irks me more than reading an entire story, only to find a weak ending. Why did you waste my time? Don't you know I have thousands to read?

9. **Conflict.** If I manage to get a page into the story, and nothing has happened yet, I don't get any further.

10. **Memoir.** Unless you're one of the Rolling Stones, don't write anything autobiographical. Sorry, but you just ain't interesting to anyone other than yourself.

11. **Adjectives and Adverbs, Exclamation Points, Repeating the same words, using the passive 'was' a lot, onomatopoeia, dialects, a first paragraph of nothing but setting, explanations, preaching, and anecdotes.** Attempt at your own risk.

Now I want to defend myself a little. I started off reading every story, begining to end. I really wanted to find a diamond in the coal mine.

But I soon learned that if it looks like a lemon, it's sour.

Did I perhaps judge unfairly? Did I maybe pass up something brilliant because it didn't meet one of my criteria? I doubt it. But if I did, too bad. Out of 2600 stories, 50 were decent. And of those, only 15 were real contenders.

I have a newfound respect for those on the other side of the submissions desk who wade through the slush pile. I understand why they are looking to reject —-there's so much to read, and so much of it is bad. And these were 1500 word stories, not 100k word novels.

I wouldn't want to do this for a living, that's for damn sure. And you know what the irony is? I made many of these same mistakes when I was starting out.

Learn from my pain.

41 comments

Writing Myths

Myth #1 - Writers Write Every Day

I'm sure there are some writers who actually write everyday, who force themselves to sit at their computers until they get their three hours, or four pages, or 1500 words.

I'm not one of them.

I do prioritize my writing, as all writers should. It's important to submit stories, finish books, meet deadlines. Hence the label *writer*. But in today's hectic world, I simply can't find the time to write every day.

If you can't find the time either, don't sweat it. Write when you can. You can prioritize something without being a slave to it.

Myth #2 - Writers Need Inspiration

I've never sat at a blank monitor, waiting to get inspired.

I write because I'm already inspired.

The age-old question, "Where do you get your ideas?" is actually backwards. It's the ideas that make writers want to write, not the other way around.

If I have a muse, it's my paycheck. That doesn't mean I don't love writing. It means I'm lucky enough to have writing as my job, and no one has a job where they're inspired 24/7.

Writers write, inspiration or not.

Myth #3 - Writing Is Difficult

Working in a factory is hard. Getting paid for your thoughts is a privilege.

Folks who complain about writing being hard need to spend a day working construction, or bar tending, or on an assembly line, or landscaping.

If it's so tortuous, so difficult, so hair-pullingly awful, why do it? Life is too short. Do something you like, or at least something that pays better.

Myth #4 - Writing Must Have Integrity

This goes along with "writing is art" and posits that our written thoughts are somehow important.

Writers are entertainers. We're the guys that tap dance on the street corner for change.

Sure, our work can have meaning. It can inspire and enthrall. But, at the end of the day, we're still not offering our readers food, clothing, shelter, or love. We're non-essential, no matter how eloquent our prose.

Plus, we still have to pay the bills. That often means doing things we don't want to do. Editing. Changing things. Maybe even writing about stuff we don't care about.

What? You don't want to sell out? You'd never let your precious words be touched, or write something for just for money? You really believe that the world owes you a job simply because you can put a noun and a verb together?

I wish you much success, and hope I never have the displeasure of sitting next to you at a party.

Myth #5 - Writer's Don't Have to Think About Sales

I've heard this one ad nauseum. Here are some of the follow-ups:

"It's a publisher's job to sell books." Really? It's your name on the book. If it fails, your publisher will still be around. You won't.

"I have no idea what genre I fit into." Congrats! You spent a year creating something that no one will want, simply because you were too self-absorbed to open your eyes.

"I can't make a difference in my sales." Books sell one at a time. Sell one, you've made a difference.

"I hate self-promoting." No one is forcing you to self-promote. No one forced you to be a writer, either. In fact, chances are you worked hard and dreamed about becoming a writer for many years, doing a lot of jobs that you really hated in order to support yourself. But now that you've been published, you think you can stop doing things you dislike?

Answer the phone, reality is calling.

(I should put that on a T-Shirt.)

Myth #6 - Good Books Always Sell

Out of all the writing myths I know, people stick most stubbornly to this one. As if the key to success is simply writing a good book. Perhaps they believe that at night, while the world sleeps, their books leap off the shelves and fly through the air visiting homes through chimneys like Santa Clause, whispering subliminal messages to snoozing readers to buy them the next day.

Writing a good book is only the first step. There are no guarantees it will even be published, let alone sell well. The best book ever written will be a miserable failure if no one knows it exists.

Your job, after writing the book, is to tell people it exists. If your book doesn't succeed, then write another one.

Myth #7 - Writers Are Rich and Famous

Maybe a few of them are. The rest of us struggle to pay our bills and don't have enough fame to talk our way out of a speeding ticket.

Myth #8 - Not Everyone Can Write

Writing is craft, and craft can be taught.

If there's a super-talented egomaniac with a sense of entitlement that matches his flair for prose and an average Joe who studies the market, hones his craft, responds to feedback, and keeps at it, my money is on Joe Average getting published first —and then having a more successful career when he does.

Hard work trumps talent. Persistence trumps inspiration. Humilty trumps ego.

Myth #9 - Writers Are Alcoholics

This one is true. Where the hell did I put that beer?

30 comments

Thinking POD? Think Again....

Authors often ask me if self-publishing is a viable option.

You'll have to work your butt off, but I believe it can be done. A few months ago I interviewed Sandy Tooley, who self publishes. And I really liked Jim Hansen's Night Laws.

But these folks became their own publishers.

POD vanity presses (XLibris, PublishAmerica, AuthorHouse, iUniverse, Booksurge) are another thing entirely. For a price, they'll publish your book.

Some quick definitions: POD is a technology that allows books to be created to order, as opposed to offset printing that requires books to be warehoused. Vanity presses are publishers that the author pays, rather than publishers that pay the author.

Is it possible to be successful using one of these services? Let's crunch some numbers. For this example we'll use real figures, but we'll call the POD vanity publisher "Happy Press."

Happy Press demands a minimum retail cover price of $18.99 for a standard 6 x 9" 250-350 page trade paperback. If your book is longer than 350 pages, the price goes up.

Would you pay almost twenty bucks for a trade paperback, when the current bookstore rate is between $10 and $16? You can buy bestselling hardcovers for $19, or for less on Amazon.

But, for this example, let's assume your book is so good that people will pay that much.

Tradional publishers offer between an 8% and 15% royalty, depending on the book type and print run. Happy Press offers a 25% royalty. This seems pretty good, but why the hell are you even getting a royalty? It's your book, you're paying to have it printed, so you should keep all the rights and make 100% of the profit. Right?

At least, you would be keeping the profits if you self-published on your own, instead of using Happy Press.

That aside, 25% of 18.99 is about $4.75.

Depending on the set-up package you buy (between $2k and $5k) you'd need to sell between 422 and 1052 to break even. But those would all have to be online sales (through Amazon mostly.) Why?

Because you still have the problem of getting your books into stores. For an extra $600 fee, Happy Press will get you into Baker & Taylor, which is a distributor. Newsflash: BT distributes millions of books. Do you see millions of books on the shelf at your local bookstore? No. Just because you have a distributor DOES NOT MEAN they'll stock your book. Only that they can order it.

Who is going to go into a bookstore and order your book? Considering POD won't get reviewed, no one will know about your book. And I'm betting that Happy Press doesn't offer the standard 55% discount to

distributors, which means the bookstores will only be able to order copies at perhaps a 15% discount (standard for POD) which means the bookstores WILL NOT carry you on the shelves. Do you think they'll stock a $19 paperback from a POD company and an author they've never heard of? They'll know you're POD because the stock number will always be 100. Do you think the postcard you sent the bookstore will persude them to stock you?

The answer: No.

Can you sell 1000 copies through Amazon? In the first few weeks of its release, bestselling author Kay Hooper sold 35,000 copies of her last book through bookstores. How many did she sell through Amazon? 300 copies. Think your book will outsell hers online? Think again.

But perhaps there's another way to get your book into stores...

Happy Press offers authors books at up to a 70% discount if they buy 1000. That sound great, doesn't it?

Perhaps you can sell those to stores yourself and make all the profit.

Let's do the math. You've got to give the bookstore a 40% discount. So you'll sell them the books for $11.40 each. That leaves you with a $5.70 profit per book. Not bad. But out of that comes the Happy Press Package fee, the printing cost, shipping the book to bookstores, and the effort to just get the bookstores to carry you (an effort that traditionally published authors don't have to make.)

Also figure in a 50% return rate.

If you get 1000 books into stores, and sell 500, you'll make $2850. Subtract the $5700 (the cost of printing 1000 books at the 70% discount) and subtract the package cost ($5000 for all the set up fees.)

You've only lost $4900, selling 500 books.

If you sell 2000 (which means you'll have to ship 4000) your total cost would be:

$5000 set-up package
$22800 book printing costs
minus $11400 profit

Which means you're losing $16400.

Let's use a best case scenario and say you bought a lesser set-up package from Happy Press and had a 75% sell through (which is impossible, but let's dream big.)

$2000 package
$22800 to print 4000 books
$34200 profit for selling 3000.

So if you sell 3000 books out of 4000 printed you'll earn a profit of $9400.

But shipping books will cost a minimum of $1 each, so subtract $4000.

Now you're in the black $5400. Not bad. But not enough to live on for a year.

And don't forget —-how did these bookstores hear about your book? You had to write them, call them, or visit them, to get them to stock you. Phone calls, mail, and gasoline all come out of your profit.

If you allow returns, you'll need a distributor, who will take an extra 15% ($5130) of the cut, plus set-up fees. And you'll still need to hustle to get the stores to carry your books.

Now let's have a reality check. Bookstores are not going to carry you. You won't get reviews. And customers won't want to buy a $19 paperback.

The only way you'll sell your books is by begging bookstores to let you do signings there and then spending several hours on your feet handselling them.

In all of my hustling, I've only handsold about 3000 copies of my books in two years. And I do a lot of hustling.

If selling your books were your full time job, and you visited a bookstore every day of the year, and sold ten books at each visit (a reasonable number) you would only sell 3650 books. Not a bad number, but for all that work, you'll be lucky to break even, let alone make enough money to compensate you for your time and effort.

My advice: Stay away from POD vanity presses.

If you want to use POD as a technology to self-publish, make sure you're hiring a printer, not a publisher. You need to keep the rights to your book.

You'll still have problems getting your books into stores and getting reviewed, but your cover price will be lower, your overall costs will be lower, and your profit margin better.

Or you can continue to improve your craft, find a good agent, and sell your book to a traditional publisher.

51 comments

A POD Story

Struggling authors often ask me if they should self-publish. I'm always hesitant to answer. I have several writer friends who have successfully self-published, and with excellent results. Unfortunately, they're the exception rather than the rule.

Many of the self-published books I've seen are poorly edited, overpriced, and shoddy-looking. Authors pay a lot of money, and end up with cases and cases of books they can't sell. Self-published books don't get reviewed (a huge source of publicity), and self-published books aren't returnable, so the major distributors and bookstores don't carry them.

A new type of vanity publisher called POD (print on demand) uses cutting edge technology to create books one at a time. But because they get their money from the author, rather than from the reader, they have no stake in whether or not the book is successful. The writer, not the book-buyer, is the customer, so POD companies tend to publish anything, no matter how poorly written. If you have five hundred bucks and a few pages of gibberish, they'll gladly take your money and publish your work.

In short: you pay a lot of money, and are stuck with something you'll never sell.

Need proof to see how unscrupulous these outfits are? Read on.

The following is 100% true. The names have been changed to protect the guilty, but not one word has been altered or omitted from the original messages.

On January 26, 2004, I was spammed by a large print-on-demand publisher. To avoid getting sued, I'll call this company FastPrint. Print-on-demand is a technology that allows authors to self-publish their books for a fee. Like all vanity presses (where you pay the publisher, rather than the publisher pays you), FastPrint offers the struggling author a quick fix for the difficult task of selling a book. The bottom line price is $500, and depending on the services you opt for, it can go much higher than that (with optional marketing plans, an author could pay well over $5000).

The problem is that POD books are more expensive than regular books, usually by several dollars. There's no distribution service for them (because they aren't returnable), so as a rule bookstores don't carry them. They also don't get reviewed. And even though you pay for the printing, the copy-editing, and the cover art, the books just don't have the same look and feel as traditionally published books. They look, well, like a vanity press.

So the unsuspecting author is stuck with an overpriced, sub-standard product that the bookstores won't carry. Trying to make the initial investment back, when FastPrint takes a liberal percentage of every sale, is difficult, if not impossible.

Since I am a smart-ass, I decided to respond to the FastPrint spam, seeing how far I could take it. I'm a published author, and I recently signed a very good deal with a well-respected NY publishing house. How long would it take FastPrint to catch on? Especially since my website and publication date are attached to the bottom of each message in my email signature?

See for yourself, as we plunge deep into the dark abyss known as:

THE FASTPRINT CHRONICLES

Sent: Monday, January 26, 2004 10:40 AM Subject: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Dear Joe,

My name is (name omitted) and I work for FastPrint, a technology-based publishing company. I noticed your name on the Official Desk of Mystery Writer Joe Konrath website, and if you don't mind, I wanted to reach out to you to let you know about a great opportunity for publishing your work. You might find it intriguing. But if you are not interested, let me know by replying to this e-mail or clicking on the link at the bottom of this message.

As a writer, publishing your work is important to your career. You probably also know how difficult the process can be. The company I work for is trying to change all that by offering affordable self-publishing services to writers of all genres. We don't take rights and we make the publication process fast and simple so that you can get your work into the hands of your readers when you want to.

FastPrint has published over 9,000 titles since 1997 and is partially owned by Big Publishing Company, BPC, a subsidiary of Super Big Publishing Company, one of the world's largest trade book publishers. While self-publishing isn't for everyone, the number of titles we've published doesn't lie: lots of writers areself-publishing their work. FastPrint helps with editorial, design, printing, distribution, fulfillment, and marketing services.

We think our services are so great that we back them up with a money-back guarantee. We'd love to talk with you about any of your publishing projects and how FastPrint might be able to help you. Please click here to register for more information. If you'd prefer, you can call us toll free at 800.555.5555 to speak with a publishing consultant. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely, (name omitted) Publishing Consultant

# # # # # # # # # # # # #

From: Joe

Subject: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Hi (name omitted)—

Will FastPrint be able to offer me a six figure contract and a multi city tour, like my current publisher has? Looking forward to your reply.

Joe

WHISKEY SOUR by J.A. Konrath Coming in hardcover, June 2004, from Hyperion www.jakonrath.com

# # # # # # # # # # # # #

Sent: Wednesday, January 28, 2004 7:35 AM

Subject: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Hi Joe,

Thanks for getting in touch with us. We can't offer you a contract up front, but many of our authors have taken their FastPrint success and gone on to much bigger and better things. Feel free to get in touch with me to discuss. Best wishes, (name omitted)

# # # # # # # # # # # # # #

From: Joe

Subject: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Hi (name omitted)—

I checked out the FastPrint website. Looking it over, I got the distinct impression that FastPrint is asking for money from authors, rather than giving money to authors. Shouldn't this be the other way around?

best, Joe

WHISKEY SOUR by J.A. Konrath Coming in hardcover, June 2004, from Hyperion www.jakonrath.com

# # # # # # # # # # # # # #

Sent: Thursday, January 29, 2004 4:25 PM

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Hi Joe,

Yes, it would be nice if every author could get published by a traditional publishing house. But, as you know, that isn't the case. Authors publishing with FastPrint do have to pay for the service but they also receive royalty payments. Also, many of our authors have been picked up by traditional publishing houses (Bantam, St. Martin's, Kensington, etc.) once their books became available through us. Please let me know if you have any further questions.

Best, (name omitted)

# # # # # # # # # # # # # #

From: Joe

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Hi (name omitted)—

It's tempting, but I'm locked into this six-figure contract with Hyperion.

How would I get out of that, in order to pay for your services at FastPrint? best,

Joe

WHISKEY SOUR by J.A. Konrath Coming in hardcover, June 2004, from Hyperion www.jakonrath.com

# # # # # # # # # # # # #

Sent: Friday, January 30, 2004 3:31 PM

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Joe,

You'd have to check with Hyperion on this. I don't know the details of your contract so I'm unable to comment. If you have any further questions about our services, or if you decide to submit something with us, please feel free to get in touch with me. I'll be happy to help you out in any way that I can.

Best wishes, (name omitted)

# # # # # # # # # # # # #

From: Joe Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Hi (name omitted)—

I just spoke with my literary agent, and she advised against trying to break my current contract. I suppose I can understand, considering the trouble she went through to land the deal. What is FastPrint's position on dealing with agents? Since I'd be paying you to get published, if I used an agent, would she also have to give you 15%?

best, Joe

WHISKEY SOUR by J.A. Konrath Coming in hardcover, June 2004, from Hyperion www.jakonrath.com

# # # # # # # # # # # # #

Sent: Tuesday, February 03, 2004 10:16 AM

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Hi Joe, If you were to publish with us, your agent would not be required to pay us any money. We have no dealings with agents. You were smart to speak with your agent regarding your contract. I would just advise you to investigate everything thoroughly before making a final decision. Please let me know if you need any more assistance from me. Best,

(name omitted)

# # # # # # # # # # # # #

From: Joe Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Dear (name omitted) —

So if I were to sign with FastPrint, I don't need my agent? I thought all writers needed an agent.

Joe

WHISKEY SOUR by J.A. Konrath Coming in hardcover, June 2004, from Hyperion www.jakonrath.com

# # # # # # # # # # # # #

Sent: Tuesday, February 03, 2004 4:46 PM

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Joe,

You don't need an agent to self-publish your book. Self-publishing helps a number of authors acquire agents...but you don't need one to self-publish.

(name omitted)

# # # # # # # # # # # # #

From: Joe

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Dear (name omitted) —

I'm working on the first book in a new mystery series. Because quirky heroes seem to sell well, I'm making my detective a Native American who lost the use of his legs in the Gulf War. He'll solve crimes and stuff. I'm thinking of calling the first book "I Hopi I'll Walk Again."

Originally, I wanted to make the hero an Indian lawyer, and I was going to call the first book "Sioux Me." Or maybe he could be a lawyer/cop, who arrests bad people and then prosecutes them. That's a good idea, isn't it? Maybe I'll do that.

What would FastPrint pay me for this book, when I finish writing it?

best,

Joe

WHISKEY SOUR by J.A. Konrath Coming in hardcover, June 2004, from Hyperion www.jakonrath.com

# # # # # # # # # # # # #

Sent: Wednesday, February 04, 2004 7:54 AM

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Joe,

All of these ideas sound great.

We don't pay authors for their work. Authors pay us an up front cost and then receive royalty payments on all sold copies of their finished book.

(name omitted)

# # # # # # # # # # # # # #

From: Joe

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

(name omitted) —

You like it? Awesome!!!!!!

I've tweaked the idea, to make it more marketable. The new title is "Rolls With Wolfs: A Paraplegic Indian Detective Mystery." (it's like a parody of Dances With Wolfs, but my guy can't dance, because he's in a wheelchair.

I decided to give my hero a more colorful background, so I made him a half-breed. His name is Geronimo Liebowitz. His mother is a full-blooded Cherokee princess, and his father works in NY's garment district.

I was writing all day yesterday, and I'm almost finished. The book will be about 22,000 words (is that a good length?). Here's how it opens:

Chapter 1

"Geronimo!!!!"

Geronimo Leibowicz spun around in his wheelchair, turning in the direction of the voice that yelled at him loudly.

No one was there. Except for... A DEAD BODY!

(How's that for an opening! The dead man is his old Olympic coach, the man who pushed Geronimo too hard years ago, and is responsible for the crippling luge accident that broke his back. So he has to solve the murder of the man who made him paralyzed!)

So if I pay FastPrint to publish this book (I think I understand it now), do you guys help with the publicity and getting it into bookstores?

Joe

WHISKEY SOUR by J.A. Konrath Coming in hardcover, June 2004, from Hyperion www.jakonrath.com

# # # # # # # # # # # # # #

Sent: Wednesday, February 04, 2004 9:30 AM

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Joe,

Yes, we have a Marketing Services Department that can assist you with publicity. As far as distribution, your book will be made available through Borders, Barnes & Noble, Amazon.com and over 25,000 other online and brick & mortar retail stores. This is not to say that your book will be on the shelves in these book stores, but people will be able to order your book through the stores.

Your book will need to be at least 100 pages (typically 30,000 words) in length.

Please let me know if you have any further questions.

Thanks.

(name omitted)

# # # # # # # # # # # # # #

From: Joe

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Hi (name omitted) —

Wow, 30,000 words is a lot. Maybe I can bump it up to 30,000 words by adding another character. I could give Gerry (only a few people in the story call him Geronimo) a girlfriend, but I don't think he can have sex because he's paralyzed.

Or (thinking out loud here), I could make Gerry gay. Then he could have a boyfriend, and there could still be sex scenes, because Gerry wouldn't really have to do anything, just lie there on the bed.

But would I be alienating readers with a gay hero?

How much does FastPrint charge, anyway? Do you take Visa?

Joe

WHISKEY SOUR by J.A. Konrath Coming in hardcover, June 2004, from Hyperion www.jakonrath.com

# # # # # # # # # # # # # #

Sent: Wednesday, February 04, 2004 2:03 PM

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: A Note on Publishing Your Writing

Joe,

At this point, I think it would be best for you to speak with a Publishing Consultant regarding your book. Our consultants are the best people to speak with about our publishing services. They will answer all of your questions thoroughly and help you get the publishing process started, if you're still interested in submitting with us.

Of course, you can feel free to ask me any questions that you have, also.

I will forward your message to our team of consultants and someone will be in touch with you shortly.

Best,

(name omitted)

# # # # # # # # # # # # # #

As of April 22, 2004, I'm still waiting for them to get in touch.

Perhaps I should send them an email?

My Funniest Rejection Letters

My name is Joe Konrath. I've published over sixty short stories and articles, sold nine novels and an anthology, and make my living as a full time fiction writer.

I've also gotten over six hundred rejections.

Rejection is part of the publishing business. This is because publishing is mostly based on luck. Getting the right story, in front of the right editor, at the right time, and you'll make a sale. But the stars pretty much have to align for this to happen.

I still get rejected all the time. Even with a few hundred thousand books in print around the world, I still have trouble getting published. It's just how the business works. Those with thin skins need not apply.

Way back in the 90s, before email offered authors the thrill of instant humiliation, rejections came via the US postal service. Looking through my massive collection, I've noticed the majority of them are Xeroxed form letters. But I've found a few choice ones to share here.

"Dear Mr. Konrath. Thank you for writing, but the agent you addressed your query to died two years ago, so he won't be reviewing your manuscript."

A shame. It was a ghost story, too.

"We passed your proposal around the office with great amusement and much laughter. Unfortunately, we don't believe you intended this to be funny."

Glad to cheer you up. Even gladder that you're now out of business.

"I didn't like anything about your book. But someone else may prove me wrong."

They did, and the book won a few awards.

"There's a lot to like about your writing, but a dying protagonist is a tough sell in these days of "continuing" sleuths."

So far, my dying protagonist has starred in six novels and four short stories.

"There is an awful lot of swearing, and if you read a lot of mysteries you will note that swearing is held to a minimum."

You obviously haven't been reading the same shit I have.

"Please find the enclosed brochure for Writing the Blockbuster Novel, a book which provides guidelines for writers seeking to create commercially successful work for today's highly competitive fiction market."

While I enjoy How-To books, I'm a bit put-off by an agent trying to sell me his. Especially since he's never written a blockbuster novel. That his book is now out of print and self-published makes me even leerier.

"I found the premise extremely imaginative and original, and you do a remarkable job balancing the brisk pacing with humor."

This is a rejection?

"Save ten dollars off the evaluation of your manuscript with this coupon."

Run away. Run away as fast as you can.

"To me, this works better as a movie."

Damn it! Why can't I write something less cinematic?

"I have just taken on a thriller with comparable qualities."

I watched. And no you didn't. A few years later, however, you did take on Chapter 11 Bankruptcy.

The list goes on, but frankly, leafing through all of my rejections began to depress me, so I stopped and grabbed a beer.

That said, even now, after an illustrious mid-list career, I still get rejected.

It isn't personal. It's business.

Remember, there's a word for a writer who never gives up: Published.

Persistence is the key. Rejections are proof you're making an effort.

The only writers who fail are those who never submit.

Now if you'll excuse me, I've got to get back to work.

Small Press vs. Big Press

In 2003 I signed a three book deal with Hyperion for the Lt. Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels thriller series. Since then I've sold over fifty articles and short stories. I also wrote the horror novel Afraid under the name Jack Kilborn. There's a word for a writer who never gives up... published.

My name is JA Konrath. I'm the writer of six thrillers in the Lt. Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels series, all of them named after drinks, the newest, Cherry Bomb, comes out July '09 from Hyperion. I'm currently on a blog tour, appearing on different blogs every day in March, to promote my new horror novel, Afraid, which was written under my pen name, Jack Kilborn. It's being released March 31, from Grand Central.

On my blog, A Newbie's Guide to Publishing, I talk a lot about the writing biz. A question I get asked a lot is: Should I submit my book to a small press?

Before I respond, you need to know a bit about my background. Before I sold my first novel in 2003, I'd gotten over 500 rejections, and had written nine books that never sold. The rejections were from agents, and publishers. Big publishers.

My two current publishers, Hyperion and Grand Central, are both big publishers.

I chose to only submit to big publishers for two reasons:

1. Big publishers pay more.

2. Big publishers have wider distribution.

As you may know, the money you're paid when you sign a publishing contract is called an advance. It's money the publisher gives you, assuming you'll sell a certain number of books to cover the amount.

For example, an advance of $10,000 means your hardcover publisher hopes you'll sell at least 3333 copies. A $24 hardcover at a 12.5% royalty rate means each book sold earns $3 for the author. If you sell 3334 copies, or more, you've then earned out your advance, and each book you sell earns you another $3.

If you received a $10,000 advance for a mass-market paperback, your publisher hopes you'll sell at least 15625 copies. A $7.99 paperback at an 8% royalty rate means each book sold earns 64 cents for the author.

In each of these cases, you're going to have to sell a lot of books in order to break even. That means libraries have to buy a lot of copies, and as many bookstores as possible need to stock you on their shelves.

Big presses are very good at selling to libraries, and to bookstores. They have large marketing and sales departments, they make deals with large distributors, and they offer bookstores discounts and coop for ordering their titles.

In short, a large publisher gets your book out there, meaning you have the potential to sell a lot of copies.

But does that mean you should always go with a large press? Aren't there also disadvantages?

It's said that sometimes large presses are more hands-off in regard to authors. This hasn't been my experience, but we've all heard stories about authors who are picked up by a large press and then lost in the shuffle. Large presses publish a lot of books, and they might not spend a great deal of time or money promoting yours, or nurturing you as an author.

Small presses, on the other hand, often have a rep for being very involved with their author's careers. Calls and emails are immediately answered. Less money is involved, but a small press has higher stakes in a book succeeding, so there tends to be more communication, more collaboration.

Or not. Any press, no matter the size, can be terrific to work with, or a nightmare. And this is often on a case-by-case basis, as one author can love a particular press, while another loathes it.

Ultimately, because this is a business, it comes down to numbers.

Are there excellent small presses? Yes. I edited an anthology called These Guns For Hire, and it was published by Bleak House. They have a lot of clout in the mystery genre, and their distribution is good enough to get their books into the bookstores. The experience was great for me.

But there was a smaller print run, and a smaller marketing budget, which meant fewer sales.

If both a big press and a small press want your work, it's a no brainer. Go with the big press. You'll sell more books.

Are there exceptions? Sure. But do you want to base your career on exceptions, or go with the average rule?

I write horror. I love the small press horror market. I wrote a novella with Jeff Strand called Suckers for Delirium Books, and they're a great publisher to work with. I recently had a novella in Like a Chinese Tattoo, for Dark Arts Books. I've got a Jack Daniels novella, co-written with Henry Perez, in the Echelon Press anthology Missing.

I'd be happy to work with any of these publishers again. Not only that, but as a fan, I've got a few hundred small press novels on my bookshelf. I love small presses.

But ask any small press author what their dream is, and it's usually to be picked up by a large press, so they can get that large print run. After all, writers want to be read by as many people as possible. A limited print run of 500 is great, and nothing to look down your nose at. But a print run of 60,000 is better.

That's why agents always start by submitting to the largest publishers first. That's why some agents don't even bother submitting to small presses. This isn't snobbery. It's a numbers game. If an author's first book is sold to a small press, who prints 1000 copies, those numbers will forever be associated with that author. So when the agent tries to sell book #2 to a big press, that press will look at the author's prior sales figures, see small numbers, and take a pass.

Unfortunate, but true.

Leisure Books is an exception here. They take a lot of small press horror, and give it the big press treatment. But Leisure published only a few dozen books a year, many of them reprints from known authors. Your small press book getting picked up by Leisure has even longer odds than submitting to big presses in the first place.

So if you're an author, what should you do? Is it better to go with a small press, or not publish at all?

It comes down to your goals.

If your goal is to see your book in print, have a cult following, and be on some panels at writing conferences, then submit to a small press. Many of them are terrific, they'll do their best to sell your book, and you'll be a legitimately published author. You won't make a lot of money, but it is tremendously satisfying, and a lot of fun.

If you want to get into chain bookstores, or even better, non-bookstore outlets like Wal-Mart (non-bookstore outlets sell as many as 50% of all books), and perhaps make a living as a writer, then hold out for a big publisher. You'll sell more books.

Of course, I recommend listening to your agent (if your book is good enough to find a publisher, you should be able to find an agent.) I also recommend asking a lot of questions before signing any contract with any publisher. At the very least, talk to a writer who is with that publisher and pick their brain.

In the meantime, I'm heading over to www.horror-mall.com and checking out some small press horror novels, because a lot of them rock.

Hail, Caesar

The Roman emperors realized that the way to win favor with the public was to give them what they wanted.

On the surface, this seems counter-intuitive, or even just plain wrong. It would seem that kings and dictators who rule with an iron fist would be able to stay in control and get more done through fear.

And yet, every Caesar built grand public buildings and held fabulous spectacles, all to keep their subjects docile by making them happy.

Now here comes the writing analogy.

How often, in your writing, do you write whatever the hell you want to write without any care at all for your audience?

When we start out, we're all 100% self-indulgent. We have huge egos that demand we put our brilliant words on paper. Of course other people will love them as much as we do. Of course they'll sell by the millions.

And then, as we head down the road to publication, we start to learn things. We learn about craft and form, and that narratives have structure and genres. We learn about editing and polishing, and how cutting and adding and getting input from others makes our work better. And eventually, if we make it far enough, we learn about marketing and selling.

We aren't really artists. We're emperors. Because, like those emperors, we start out doing whatever we desire. But we come to realize that if we want to keep being emperors, the key is to sell as much of our work as possible. And that means giving the people what they want.

I've said, ad nauseum, that before you create a key, study the lock. Know who the audience is, and who the buyer is, before you even write the first word of a story.

But if you want to make people happy, and keep them buying your work (or visiting your blog, or downloading your freebies, or entering your contests, or attending your appearances) you have to know more than just the genre and prospective publisher. It's very easy to say, "I'm writing a mystery because a lot of people buy mysteries and a lot of houses publish mysteries so I've figured out the lock before I make the key" and still be way off the mark in terms of success.

So how do you figure out what people want?

Readers of this blog know that people seek two things from writers: information and entertainment. The specific kind of information and entertainment, however, is mostly subjective, and often hard to guess.

So here are some hints.

1. **Look Inward.** We all start out trying to please ourselves, and this might actually end up being helpful. If you think something is funny, chances are other people do as well. So while you're

attempting to please your audience, remember what works on you. What books do you like to read? Why do you enjoy them? What are the last five books you've bought and why?

The more you understand yourself, the better you'll understand others.

2. **Look Outward.** Read as much as you can. Join a writers group and critique others. Figure out what works, what doesn't, and come up with reasons why.

   You shouldn't write in a genre you aren't well-read in. You shouldn't submit a story to a magazine unless you've read several issues cover to cover. Every time you write, you aren't reinventing the wheel. You're simply putting a new spin on the wheel. Figure out how the wheel works, then you can spin it accordingly.

3. **Get Feedback.** There are a few jokes I tell that NEVER get a laugh, even though I think they're funny.

   A story, or a speech, or a blog, isn't a monologue. It is an exchange, and involves at least one other person. Pay attention to how that person responds. With a blog or a speech, you can get feedback quickly. With a story, you have to solicit it.

   Seek out peers, and trade manuscripts with them to critique. Pay attention to agents and editors — they're on your side and want to make the story better. Find as many beta readers as you can, and be ready to ask them questions about what is and isn't working.

4. **Respect Your Audience.** Once you learn who your audience is, and what they want, it is your job to never let them down. Ways to let them down include:

   - Talking down to them
   - Talking over their heads
   - An unsatisfying ending
   - Making your characters do uncharacteristic things
   - Too many coincidences
   - Unfunny humor
   - Poor or confusing structure
   - Unrealistic romance
   - Gratuitous anything
   - Self-indulgence

All writers really need to watch the last one. If you think you may be showing off, or know in your heart that the line/scene you just wrote will never fly, chances are high it will never fly.

Once you fall in love with your own voice, you get bestselleritis. If you're a bestseller, this disease won't do you much harm. You can keep writing long-winded, self-important, unrealistic crap that's a shell of your early work, and because people are creatures of habit they'll keep buying it —although you can expect them to voice their disapproval on Amazon.com.

But if you're a new writer, and you expect people to bend over and accept your writing simply because you think it's good enough —that's a career killer.

In fact, it's wise to never believe your own hype, at any stage of your career.

Ultimately, we're entertainers. We're the people who play sax on street corners for pocket change. The more people we entertain, the more money we get. So remember to take requests...

15 comments

How To Get Published

There have been hundreds of books on how to get published. Here's my condensed version:

1. **Write When You Can -** Find the time to write, even if you have to give up other things to do so. And know who your audience is, and as much about that audience as possible, before you write your first word.

2. **Finish What You Start -** Turn off your internal editor until you finish that first draft, and get to the ending no matter how much you think it sucks.

3. **Edit What You Finish -** Rewrite, add, cut, and polish. Then give it to others to read, consider their suggestions, and keep repeating the process until you've got something your peers, and you, consider decent.

   Here's a critique sheet to help you out. http://www.jakonrath.com/critsheet.pdf.

4. **Submit What You Edit -** Since you know your audience, you should know who reps/publishes your type of story. And don't get hung up on writing the perfect query letter. The writing sells the writing, not the query letter. All a query needs is a two sentence description of the book (mention setting, genre, and a bestselling similar work by another author), some praise for the recipient, and a thank you.

5. **Repeat**

That's all. Now stop sweating the process and go do it.

25 comments

Should You Self-Publish?

I've been getting a lot of emails from people wondering if they should self-publish, specifically on the Amazon Kindle.

My answer is always the same: It depends.

Here is my advice, based on what I would do.

IF YOU WROTE A NOVEL

I believe your first order of business is getting a well-respected literary agent. The best way to land an agent is: write a damn good book. After the book is perfect, there are a few ways to find agents.

- Visit writing conferences and conventions and pitch to agents in person
- Read books similar to yours, and find out who reps the author
- Pick up a copy of the Writer's Market
- Visit www.aar-online.org
- Befriend an agented author and beg for an introduction

After getting an agent, she'll want to submit the book to editors at large New York publishing houses. If you get lucky, you'll land a book contract. This is the best-case scenario.

Exception: You Can't Get an Agent

Getting a good agent isn't easy, which is why you should spend as much time as possible honing your craft, improving your writing, learning about narrative structure and the elements of a compelling story. I got rejected over 500 times, but the vast majority of these rejections were for books that were not very good.

Should you self-publish if you can't find an agent? I would say no. If a hundred lit agents all think the book needs work, I'd bet the book needs work, and releasing it into the world isn't going to win you fans or do your career any favors.

Exception: Your Agent Can't Sell the Book

If you landed a lit agent, chances are your story is good enough to be published. But just because something is good enough to be published doesn't mean it will be published. This is a hard business, and luck plays a huge part.

If your agent has sent the book to everyone, and no one made an offer, I would say that e-book self-publishing is a viable alternative.

I would avoid print self-pubbing if you some day want a traditional book deal, because numbers follow you. If you get an ISBN, that number is trackable, and so are the sales associated with it. A potential publisher will look at your previous low sales and possibly pass on your next book.

Exception: You Don't Care About Agents or Traditional Publishers

It's important to talk about goals and dreams here.

A goal is something within your power to achieve.

A dream is something that requires other people for you to achieve.

If your dream is to be a bestselling author, your goals should be:

1. Write a damn good book
2. Submit to agents until you find one to work with
3. Keep writing good books until your agent sells one

However, if your goal is to see your name in print and you're okay with investing your own money and doing three times the work for very little respect:

1. Write a damn good book
2. Self-publish it

In the past, I never recommended self-publishing because in 99% of the cases the books are overpriced and inferior (poor covers, poor editing, poor writing), distribution is very hard (no returns on POD), and chances are high you won't sell many books that you didn't personally handsell.

But things have changed.

The Amazon Kindle and Amazon's CreateSpace, along with printers like Lulu.com, allow you to self-publish without investing a lot of your own money.

THIS IS NOT THE QUICK PATH TO FAME AND FORTUNE

Your Kindle release, or your POD book, will likely get lost in a sea of millions, making it very hard for readers to find you. If you have an understanding of how publishing, distribution, and marketing works, then maybe you can sell some books and do well. But if you're clueless, YOUR BOOK WILL NOT SELL.

Simple as that.

Personally, I wouldn't self-publish a novel unless you already have a name for yourself. If you've been traditionally published and have a fan base, if you're a celebrity, if you do a lot of speaking engagements and can sell your books after your speeches, or if you already have an audience, then you've got a better chance at selling some books.

IF YOU WROTE A NOVELLA

We'll define novella as a narrative between 7,000 and 50,000 words. In other words, too long for a short story, too short for a novel, meaning it's very difficult to find a traditional print market willing to buy it.

The rules for novellas are the same as the rules for novels, but disregard finding an agent. Agents don't care about novellas, unless they're so good you can beef them up to novel-size.

I believe novellas are where e-book self-publishing really has an advantage over print. A 15,000 word book doesn't cost much less than a 70,000 word book to produce, so it has to be priced comparably, and people don't want to pay full price for something so short. But in a digital world, you can lower the price of shorter work.

Personally, I see no harm at all in e-publishing a novella on your website (use Paypal.com if you want to charge for it), on Scribd.com, or on Kindle. Worst case-scenario: It doesn't sell at all, but you weren't going to sell it anyway. Best case scenario: It sells well, you make some money and also learn a lot.

I would restrict this to e-publishing because of the costs associated with print. Print novellas cost too much, and they don't sell as well as full length novels.

IF YOU WROTE A SHORT STORY

While the print short story market is dwindling, I believe it is still the preferred medium for shorts.

Writing and submitting short stories to magazines, anthologies, and websites, forces writers to understand the basics of publishing. There is a learning curve in crafting a story, researching markets, and writing query letters. I think all writers can benefit from this.

I also recommend NEVER writing a short story unless you already have a market in mind. Would you create a key without studying the lock first? No. Same rule applies.

If you do sell a short story, I recommend waiting for at least a year after publication before you offer the story on your website or on Kindle. Your contract may say you have e-rights, or that you have permission to publish sooner, but I think it's nice to let the editor who paid you have an exclusive for 12 months.

Once of the reasons I began putting shorts on my website was because fans were having trouble tracking down out of print magazines and anthologies I'd appeared in. E-publishing makes it easy for people to read your entire oeuvre, and the reprint market (editors who buy previously published stories) is now smaller than ever. Years ago, you could sell the same story multiple times. I've published over 70 stories and articles, and less than a handful have actually been reprinted. Unless you're a big enough name that your publisher will release a short story collection (usually at a loss), then feel free to e-publish your old print stories.

Exception: Your Short Story Didn't Sell

Once you've exhausted all of your markets, there's no shame in e-publishing it. Unless you've already got a fan base, I'd recommend putting the short on your website as a free download. But MAKE SURE IT IS GOOD.

Your best advertising for your writing is your writing. If people try you and don't like you, this is the opposite of finding fans.

Again, I'd avoid self-publishing short stories in print. Even if you gather up enough of them to make a full length book, they don't sell as well as novels. Period.

But I see no harm in e-publishing. I'd price them low (or free) and group them together so it is a more appealing download.

IF YOU WROTE NON-FICTION

See the If You Wrote a Novel section above, but there are a few differences.

You don't normally submit non-fiction books to agents or publishers. You submit a proposal, which isn't the full book. If you can't find an agent or a publisher based on a proposal, I would question if you should even bother to write the book in the first place.

Look at your goals and dreams. Maybe you've got a memoir that you want your family to have copies of. Maybe you wrote a cookbook for your friends who are always asking for your recipes. Maybe you get paid good money to speak on some topic you're an expert on, and selling a book after your speeches is a smart add-on.

If you have a need other than vanity, maybe you should write the book, and should self-publish it.

I self-published an **e-book about writing** which I give away for free, because my goal is to share what I've learned about this business. So far it's been downloaded over 6000 times, and I get just as much fanmail about it as I do from my novels. For me, this was well worth my time and effort, and it satisfies me on a core level even more than money does.

CONCLUSION

There are no short cuts, no easy paths to success, no matter how you publish. You're going to wind up marketing, promoting, and working hard whatever you decide.

Traditional publishing has the advantages of big money and a huge distribution network, though you might not get either even if you are traditionally published.

Self-publishing is an alternative, but at the time of this writing it still lacks in too many areas compared to trad pubbing, except in some circumstances.

Your job is to figure out what it is you want, and then decide on the best way to get it.

Should you self-publish? It depends.

But first focus on making your writing the best it can be.

48 comments

Publishing

Negotiating Contracts

Let's talk about negotiating contracts.

As authors, we're so damn needy we usually accept whatever we're offered. We're afraid that if we don't take the offer, we won't get published.

Publishers know this. And they use this to their advantage. It is in their best interest to offer low advances and try to acquire as many sub rights as possible.

One one hand, if your book does well, the advance doesn't matter much —-royalties will kick in, and you'll get quarterly checks.

On the other hand, a healthy advance lets you spend more time and money self-promoting, which can only help your sells. A healthy advance also shows that your publisher is confident in your books, and will spend a sizable amount on marketing them.

A wonderful book was recommended to me, called The Secrets of Power Negotiating by Roger Dawson. It demystifies a lot about negotiation, and tells you how to respond when your publisher lowballs you, pulls offers off the table, and basically tries to show you that they don't need you.

Truth told, your publisher doesn't need you. But you don't really need them either.

When you're negotiating a contract, your agent should be doing most of the work. But there are some things you should know before you enter negotiations.

1. How much you want per book.
2. What rights you're offering.
3. What your previous sales figures are.
4. What your sell-through is, and how many printings you've had.
5. What will make you walk away from the negotiating table.
6. How you will react to every point and counterpoint your publisher brings up.

The last one is especially important. You should always have an answer for anything your publisher throws at you. This means brainstorming, practicing, and role-playing.

By role-playing, I mean talking out things with a trusted friend playing the part of your publisher, so you're prepared if these things come up in negotiations.

What are you going to say when your publisher tells you:

"Your first book(s) didn't do as well as expected."

"That's as high as we can go."

"If you don't accept now we're pulling this offer from the table."

"The market for your genre is collapsing."

"We're the best publisher for your book, and we love you here."

"We can't offer more money in the advance, but we can offer X in bonuses for copies shipped, hitting the NYT list, copies sold, etc."

Be prepared to counter these statements using a combination of facts and logic. Passion is fine when negotiating. Anger is not.

If you want to be in a position of power while negotiating, you need to:

1. Be in control of your emotions.
2. Be knowledgeable about your numbers.
3. Be confident, but not cocky.
4. Be polite, but firm.
5. Be prepared for every possible thing that may come up.
6. Be willing to walk away.

Your agent should already know all of this. But you should discuss this with her anyway.

It may seem obvious, but it's easier to sell a finished book than a proposal. Just because your contract is finished doesn't mean you need another one immediately. It is almost always better for you to finish your next book and shop it around rather than accept your current publisher's low offer on a proposal.

Negotiation is a dance. Try to lead, rather than follow. And if you don't like your dance partner, find another one.

15 comments

Press Releases

In my continuing effort to become known as the Martha Stewert of thriller writers (except for the prison part) I write my own press releases.

The problem with press releases when you're a fiction writer is: There's nothing press-worthy about writing a book.

Sure, you're excited about it. Hopefully your publisher is too. But why should the Podunk Times or Small World Weekly care?

To be considered newsworthy is difficult. Even newsworthy stuff needs to have a spin on it before it can reach the masses, or else it isn't interesting enough to warrant the time and/or space.

My new novel, while a helluva lot of fun to read, isn't really newsworthy. But a press release is still needed to help garner reviews and make media folks aware a new Konrath book is coming.

However, my upcoming Rusty Nail 500 Tour, IS newsworthy. This has never been done before, and is a fresh approach to book publicity.

So this year I'm doing two press releases. Since it's the least interesting of the two, I'm posting a link to the Rusty Nail Press Release, which you can view as a pdf. Click **HERE** if you'd like to see what it looks like.

I had more fun with the Rusty Nail 500 press release. Here's the text for it:

AUTHOR TAKES BOOK TOUR TO GREAT LENGTHS

In a day and age when multi-million dollar ad campaigns drive the bestseller lists, and many of the books sold in America are through outlets such as Wal-Mart and Costco, breaking out a midlist author is harder than ever.

One author has come up with a non-traditional way to spread the word. JA Konrath (author of the previous Lt. Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels thrillers Whiskey Sour and Bloody Mary) is hopping into a rental car and driving cross country, signing at 500 bookstores in two months.

Supported by his publisher, Hyperion Books, Konrath will average 8 bookstore drop-ins a day, where he'll sign stock, meet the booksellers, and pass out signed drink coasters featuring the cover of his latest novel, RUSTY NAIL.

"Hyperion sent me on a traditional tour last year, visiting ten cities in eleven days," says Konrath. "These were scheduled events, and I had decent fan turnouts. But the real success of the tour happened between signings, when I managed to visit an additional ninety-six stores during that time frame."

Konrath believes that meeting the people who sell his books is the only way to compete with the mega-bestselling authors and their huge marketing campaigns.

"Enormous print runs and large co-op budgets don't impress booksellers any more. But actually meeting bookstore owners, managers, and employees, is a grass roots approach that people seem to enjoy. I certainly do. I love meeting booksellers."

That love extends to print. Konrath has named five major characters in past and upcoming books after booksellers, and has thanked hundreds of them on his acknowledgements pages. Every single bookseller he meets on this current tour, which he's dubbed The Rusty Nail 500, will be similarly thanked.

The tour kicks off July 6th, and you'll be able to follow his daily progress on his website and blog at www.JAKonrath.com.

Writing press releases isn't rocket science, but it is much different than writing prose. I suppose having a background in news or advertising is helpful. I have neither, but the formula is pretty simple to pick up if you study it.

1. **What is happening and who is involved?**
2. **Why is it relevant or important or newsworthy?**
3. **Where and when is it occurring?**
4. **How can we get more information?**

Brevity is important, because media folks are busy. It's like breaking and entering; get in and get out fast.

Quotes or blurbs are good, because they add a human element and take some of the writing responsibility away from the media person, who is almost assuredly overworked and pressed for time.

In this day and age, the hook is almighty. You need to spin your press release to make it seem very relevant, or else it won't attract media attention. What makes your book different from the 40,000 other novels being published this year? Why are you newsworthy?

Pictures aren't normally included in press releases, but in this case, my publisher is making this shot available to those who are interested: **www.jakonrath.com/RustyNail500.pdf**. I think it's a good indicator of the scope of what I'm attempting, and often pictures help to sell stories.

Should you write your own press releases? I can't answer that. Perhaps your publisher's copywriter is a genius at this stuff, and can do a much better job that you. Or perhaps your press releases are written by your publicist, who just graduated college and hasn't even read your book.

At the very least, you should have the opportunity to read your press releases before they get sent out. If this isn't offered to you, don't be afraid to ask. You also shouldn't be afraid to offer your services to tweak, or even write, the press release yourself. Chances are, whoever is writing your press releases is overworked and under a time crunch, and your assistance will probably be appreciated.

19 comments

That About Covers It Part 1

Before we get into the topic of this blog entry, I wanted to say something about the new look. I've finally upgraded my Blogger template, which now makes adding links a snap. Check to see if you're listed in the links. If you're not, contact me and I'll add you.

Also, I'm putting together a list of all the cool folks who reviewed Dirty Martini, to thank them in the acknowledgements of my next book, and to send them free stuff. If you reviewed me, please drop me a line with your name and address. Thanks, big time. You rock.

Now let's talk cover art.

It is well known in the publishing biz that even huge bestselling authors don't get cover approval in their contracts. Usually, there's a clause that says the author has "cover consulting" which means the publisher makes a cover, the author complains that it is absolutely wrong, and the publisher uses it anyway.

This isn't always the case. Sometimes the author makes some suggestions, and the publisher makes the requested changes.

If you hate your cover, there are some things to keep in mind.

1. Remember that your publisher paid someone to create this, usually based on concepts or ideas that orginated in a meeting. That means a lot of people may have had hands in the design. Screaming how much it sucks won't win you any popularity contests.

2. Your agent is your buffer. Use her. Let her express your unhappiness, so you don't come off looking like an ungrateful prick. Don't respond or reply until you've conferred with your agent and decided on a game plan.

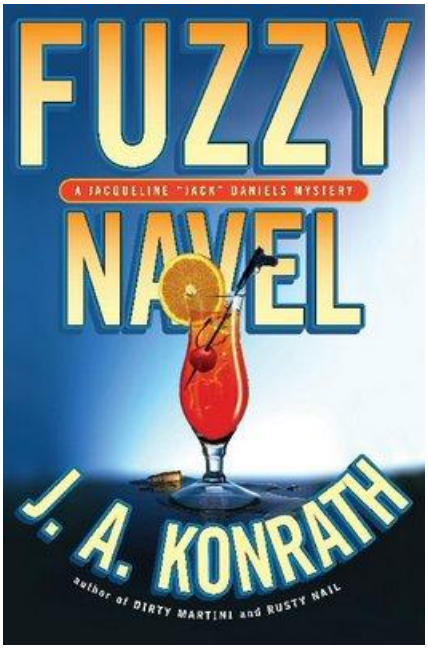
3. Make sure you point out the things that you like about the cover. Even if it's the font, or the way all four corners are perfect 90 degree angles. Say something positive before you start criticizing.

4. Explain why the cover doesn't work for you. Break it down, point by point, and go into some detail why it isn't going to have the desired effect on buyers. Save the passion for the conversation with your agent. Be clinical and intelligent.

5. Offer solutions. Easier solutions will be easier to change than complete overhauls. Overhauls take time and more money. Quick fixes are more apt to be obliged.

6. Be grateful, even if they don't listen to anything you say. Your publisher is your most powerful ally. Don't make them an enemy by being a snotty jerk.

That said, I recently got my cover art for Fuzzy Navel.



I have four minor issues with this cover. Three of those issues have to do with continuity, comparing this to my previous covers. One is something I simply don't like, because it looks odd.

Can you spot my four issues? You can click on it to make it bigger and see more detail. The first person to correctly identify all four gets an advance reading copy when they are printed up.

I'll reveal the answers on Monday, and also reveal how my publisher responded to my suggestions.

58 comments

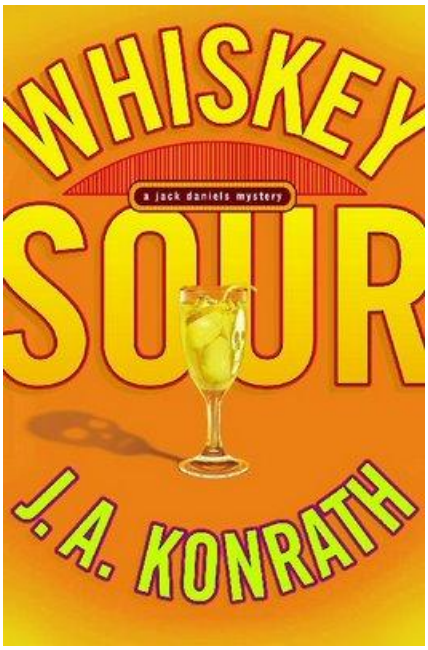
That About Covers It Part 2

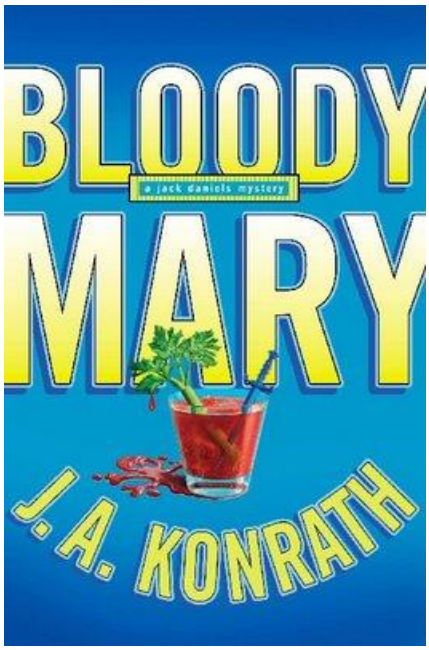
When I was sent the cover art for my latest Lt. Jack Daniels novel, Fuzzy Navel, I liked it. The cover designer kept up the theme of the previous four books in the series, which is extremely important when building a brand.

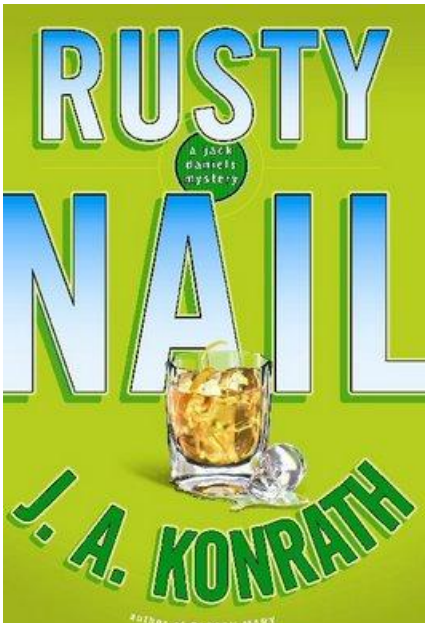
If you've read this blog before, you know I'm big on branding. The fact that someone can go into a bookstore and say, "I'm looking for a mystery series but I don't know the author, or the main character, of the titles of any of the books, but I know they're all named after drinks" is not accidental. It's a calculated effort on my part to establish a brand.

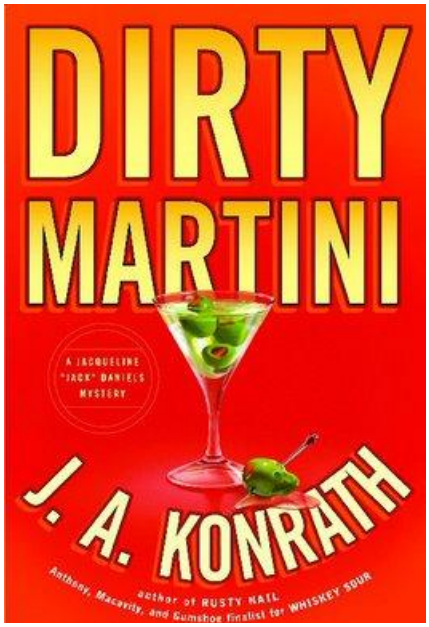
Covers sell books. And having a consistent cover style, which can be recognized by fans by sight before they even see the book's title, is smart business.

Hyperion, my publisher, is smart. Not only have they provided my series with attractive, eye-catching covers, but they've also made sure that each new cover fits in with the theme. Here's what they've done so far:

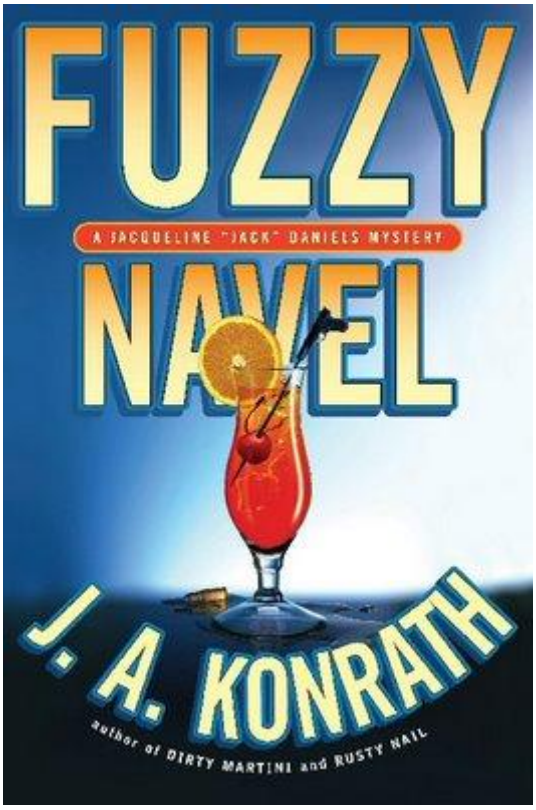








The newest cover for Fuzzy Navel fit within this theme, but I had a four problems with it. Three were issues of consistency, and the fourth was stylistic.



So I emailed my agent and said this:

"I like it, but have a few small problems. The biggest is that my second novel, Bloody Mary, had a blue cover. I'm worried that when future fans see the paperback on the shelf, they'll believe they already read the "blue" book, and miss out buying one or the other. How about purple as the background color?

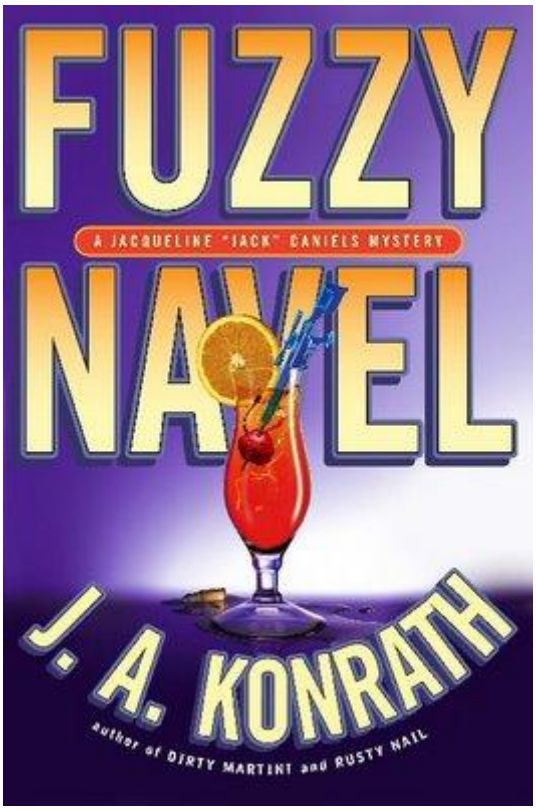
Also, one of the fun things about my covers is the hidden skull somewhere in the picture. This one doesn't have a skull. Maybe the cover artist can make the cherry into a skull?

Looking back on previous covers, I also noticed that both words of the title are the same length, stretching across the whole cover. In Fuzzy Navel, the second word is shorter.

Finally, and this is purely opinion on my part, I really don't like the gun on the swizzle stick. It looks like a spear gun. Is there any way to turn it into a sniper rifle, which is what the villains in Fuzzy Navel use?"

My agent agreed, and forwarded my note to my editor.

A week passed without a response. Then two weeks. I wondered if I annoyed my publisher with my suggestions. Then I got an email from them with this attached:



So they followed every one of my suggestions, and I think this cover works better. I also feel damn good about my publisher. They actually listened to me, when they could have easily done whatever they wanted to do. Points for them, and I'll remember this when the next contract negotiation takes place.

While many of my peers believe that the only thing you can get out of a publisher is advance money, I remain unconvinced. Call me naive, but I think there's still room for loyalty, mutual respect, and an open exchange of ideas and information between writer and publisher. Ideally, these efforts should compliment each other, and each party should have a similar vision for the book or books, and a plan to make that vision a reality.

A cover is part of that shared vision. If you have problems with a proposed cover, talk to your agent and calmly explain what doesn't work and why. As the song says, you can't always get what you want, but if you try sometimes you just might find you get what you need...

39 comments

Rusty Nail, Street Dates, Jacket Copy & Book Covers

I've gotten reports from several sources that ***Rusty Nail*** is appearing on the shelves at various bookstores.

The street date is July 5. A street date for a book serves two purposes:

1. It allows for an even playing field when booksellers begin to sell the book. Shipping con sometimes be delayed, which means one store might have copies a week or even two before other stores. With a street date, everyone (theoretically) begins to sell it at the same time, so no one can get a jump on anyone else.
2. To make it on the bestseller lists, you need a lot of books sold in a short amount of time. If different booksellers begin to sell your book at staggered times, the initial launch is scattered, and not as dramatic. (you sell 5000 books over two weeks rather than two days)

That said, I'm not a big enough fish to warrant a hard street date (or at least to enforce a hard street date.) So I encourage everyone reading this to run out and buy as many copies of *Rusty Nail* as you can afford.

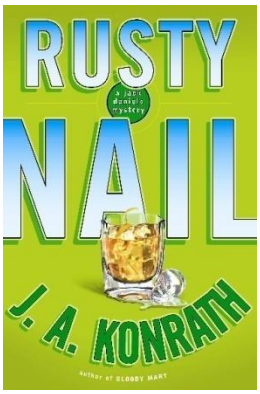
If you're a fan of thrillers, or even if you hate thrillers but find this blog helpful, put me in your karma debt and hop on over to your local bookseller and demand my book. I'd appreciate it, big time.

What is *Rusty Nail* about? Here's what the jacket says:

— —

Front cover:

"Thrills, chills, and laugh-out-loud hilarity...Konrath expertly pours on both shivers and fun." —Tess Gerritsen, author of **Vanish**



Anthony, Macavity, and Gumshoe Finalist for Whiskey Sour

Front inside flap:

"Konrath creates the perfect blend of pulse-pounding thrills and side-splitting humor." - David Ellis, author of ***In the Company of Liars***.

Lt. Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels of the Chicago Police Department is back, and once again she's up to her Armani in murder.

Someone is sending Jack snuff videos. The victims are people she knows, and they share a common trait —each was involved in one of Jack's previous cases. With her stalwart partner, Herb, hospitalized and unable to help, Jack follows a trail of death throughout the Midwest, on a collision course with the smartest and deadliest adversary she has ever known.

During the chase, Jack jeopardizes her career, her love life, and the lives of her closest friends. She also comes to a startling realization —serial killers have families, and blood runs thick.

Rusty Nail features more of the laugh-out-loud humor and crazy characters that saturated *Whiskey Sour* and *Bloody Mary*, without sacrificing the nail-biting thrills. This is Lt. Jack Daniels' third, and most exciting, adventure yet.

Back inside flap:

"Jack Daniels is a detective for the new millennium: sharply witty, deftly wry, and unabashedly clever." - James Rollins, author of ***Black Order***.

(graphic of rocks glass and skull in rifle crosshairs)

A native of Chicago, J.A. Konrath is the author of the thrillers *Whiskey Sour* and *Bloody Mary*. If you'd like to see revealing photos of J.A., read free Jack Daniels short stories, and enter cool contests, visit **www.JAKonrath.com**

(graphics of Whiskey Sour and Bloody Mary)

Back cover:

Praise for *Rusty Nail*

"Tougher than Kay Scarpetta, smarter than Stephanie Plum, Jacqueline Daniels rocks." — Alex Kava, author of ***A Necessary Evil***

"A heady mixture of chills and chuckles. You'll drain this libation in a single sitting!" — Julia Spencer-Fleming, author of ***To Darkness and to Death***

"Finely honed characters and a plot blessed with more twists than a drunk on a bender, J.A. Konrath has stirred up another addictive suspense novel that will leave readers salivating for more —and more." — Gayle Lynds, author of ***The Coil***

"Rusty Nail is twisted and violent, creepy and clever, fast, frightening, and funny. This is not your granny's thriller." — Anne Fraiser, author of ***Before I Wake***

(graphic of rocks glass and skull)

Praise for J.A. Konrath's previous novels:

"Excellent smart-mouth thrills. My advice...take a long sip." — Lee Child, author of ***One Shot***

"Snappy dialogue. Powerful action. A fabulous character to spend time with." — David Morrell, author of ***Creepers***

"Tough, gritty, and surprisingly touching." — M.J. Rose, author of ***The Delilah Complex***

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Covers are important. Some booksellers believe they are the single most important element when it comes to book sales. I agree. A good cover arouses interest and provokes sales. It is what makes a browser take a closer look.

A cover needs to do several things all at once:

1. It has to be eye catching, to stand out among the other books.
2. It has to portray the theme/tone/genre of the book.
3. It has to establish a brand.
4. It has to inform.
5. It has to make the buying decision simple.

I have a lot of input on my covers. Not on the art, but on the text. The art is all my publisher's call, and I think they're doing a good job because they're meeting the first three requirements I just mentioned. My covers are bright, attractive, and convey both my genre and my brand.

Once the cover makes a customer pick up the book, the words are what will ultimately hook them.

I like having these things on my covers:

1. **Blurbs by bestselling authors.** I solicit my own blurbs (one of the benefits of networking) and I try to get blurbers whose audience I share. On the previous two books, I had almost all men, so for *Rusty Nail* I went with mostly women. I'm banking on the fact that readers care more about what Tess Gerritsen says than what Publisher's Weekly says, so I don't use a lot of reviews.

   The blubs pretty much reiterate the point I make in my jacket copy: the books are funny and scary. They also tell the reader that if they like Tess, Alex, Julia, Gayle, Anne, David, Jim, Lee, or MJ, it's a safe bet they'll like me too.

2. **Jacket copy.** Because my series is still pretty new and relatively unknown, I can't assume a potential reader is aware of my first two novels. I want the ad copy to hint at the main conflict, emphasize the book has both thrills and laughs, and give a bit of info about the protagonist, but not reveal too much in the way of plot. This is the sizzle, not the steak. A scent, not a taste. If they want a taste, they can begin to read it.

3. **Bio.** I like my bio to be super brief and to subtly lure folks to my website. A picture isn't going to help me sell books, so we don't use a picture, which frees up space for more blurbs.

4. **Series.** I believe that readers are looking for long-term relationships with authors. A series is a good way to establish a commitment between writer and fan. I make sure my cover emphasizes that there are other Jack books, because it tells readers I won't just be a one night stand.

Though there's a lot of text on my covers, they aren't crammed full of it. The words are in a large, easy to read font, with plenty of graphics and negative space to break them up.

The goal of the cover is to give the customer something they recognize, even if you're a new author to them. People buy what is familiar and comfortable. They are brand loyal. If they have a good experience, they seek out the same experience again and again.

I like my covers, because I feel as if they're doing what they're supposed to. it will be interesting to see if the public feels the same way.

17 comments

MONEY With A Capital M-O-N-E-Y

Let's talk about getting paid.

As writers, we're often so grateful that someone would actually want to publish our words that we may devalue them. Hell, sometimes we pay others to publish us.

This mentality won't help you make a living.

But the problem is that so little is written about money, we really have no idea how much we're worth.

Unlike other professions, where salaries often stay within a certain range, a novelist can earn anywhere from some contributors copies to tens of millions of dollars a book.

So what are your words worth?

If you're writing poetry, they're worth pretty much nothing. Sorry poets.

If you're a short story writer, they're worth between 2 cents and 20 cents a word. There are exceptions, of course, but the most I've even been paid for a short story is $1500, and they mostly pay in the low hundreds.

If you're a freelance article writer, the price can go up a bit. But you have to publish a lot of articles to make a living, and finding places to buy your articles is actually more work than writing them.

Now if you're a novelist, I've heard the average advance is still $5000. A tiny amount for something you spent a year of your life on. And this average includes all of the huge bestsellers making big bucks, so you have to assume there are tens of thousand of writers out there making much less than $5000 a novel.

I've talked money with a few close writing friends, and I've learned something pretty shocking; there's no rhyme, reason, or sense as to who gets paid what and why.

First of all, we need to dispel any bullshit about "talent" and "hard work." We're all talented. We all work hard. That's how we got published in the first place.

Next, we need to shatter the time-honored myths about "deserving success."

Here's your wake-up call, Mr. or Ms. Entitlement. I've gotten over 500 rejections. I wrote 1,000,000 words before earning a dime. In the last four years I've travelled to over 35 states, visited over a thousand bookstores, attended over a hundred book events. I've mailed out over 7000 letters to libraries and bookstores. I've signed over 10,000 books, and 30,000 drink coasters. I have 13,000 MySpace Friends, and my blog and website combine for more than half a million unique hits a year.

I still do not deserve success. And neither do you.

There is no arbitrary power controlling fairness in the universe, making sure everyone gets their due. There is only luck.

Those writers who make more money simply got lucky.

I have peers who earn 20 times what I make, even though our sales numbers are pretty close. I have friends with over a million books in print, who make less than half of what I make.

It's not fair. It never will be.

Now that we've got that established, let's talk about what we can do to get more.

1. Be Confident. You must have faith in your writing, and your efforts. Being cocky, or feeling entitled, won't work. But knowing your strengths, and your platform, and being able to show that to a room full of editors will go a long way to getting a better contract.

2. Ask For More. Waiting for someone to notice your genius and get behind your books is a fools game. The only way to get more is to ask for more.

3. Change. Often the only way to get a big bump up in net worth is to change something. Genres. Houses. Agents. Working with new people means new excitement, new enthusiasm, new expectations. This translates into more money.

4. Be Willing to Walk Away. This is something that VERY few writers can do. We accept offers, don't negotiate hard, and perhaps devalue our writing because of it. This is a self-fulfilling prophecy. A house that pays less will have less of a marketing budget, which means the book will sell fewer copies.

5. Earn Out Your Advance. It's your name on the book. It's your responsibility to sell it. I've heard agents say that if a book earns out, the advance wasn't high enough. I think the opposite is true. if your advance is so large that you'll never earn out, it's going to be very difficult to sell your next book.

Can you earn out your advance through your efforts? Maybe not. But I'm pretty sure my efforts contributed to my earning out. While you don't have to be as psychotic about promotion as I've been, every single book you sell goes toward your advance, and toward your future sales when that person becomes a lifelong fan. The more you do, the more you'll sell.

6. Take Control. So much is beyond your control in this business. But a lot of things are within your control. You do not have to wait for your agent or your publisher to tell you what to do. You can't fight the power by reacting.

You're the boss in the agent/author relationship. Your agent is probably savvier than you are, and knows more about the business. That's not an excuse to stay ignorant. You should learn as much about this business as possible. Trends. Gossip. How it works. Who is buying what.

If your publisher doesn't tour you, doesn't put down money for coop, doesn't have a wide distribution, that doesn't mean you can't fill in a lot of these divots yourself.

No, you can't personally sell 100,000 books. But you can personally sell 10,000. And that's not small potatoes.

7. Know Your Worth. This is a hard one to figure out, because comparing yourself with other authors does zero good. But you can't enter any sort of contract negotiation without having a number in mind. If you accept any old number, that's like dogs begging for scraps.

The dog that is content begging for scraps will never get the whole steak.

You need to go for the steak. That means placing a value on your work, and sticking to it.

"But JA," you say, "What if I don't get that number I have in mind? Isn't this more bad advice, like telling authors not to use SASEs and recommending they give exclusive submissions to a bunch of agents at once?"

If you can live with what you're being offered, that's fine. But then you've lost your License to Bitch. You can't complain about your shitty deal if you didn't have the stones to ask for more.

Also, SASEs and exclusive submissions suck.

"But JA," you insist, "You say this is all about luck. What if I do everything right, and I still can't earn enough money writing to support myself because I haven't gotten lucky yet?"

It sounds like you think you deserve this career. I've already stated my thoughts on that. The world doesn't owe you. And may not get out what you put in. Quit writing and buy stock in Kleenex, so at least you'll recoup some of your money during your life-long pity party.

"But JA," you say, "With everything you've said and done, with all your hard work, you still haven't gotten lucky. Why should I listen to you? You're not a millionaire bestseller."

Yet.

I'm not going to become rich because I deserve it.

I'm going to become rich because nothing is going to stop me.

What are you going to let stop you?

28 comments

Royalties

A New York Times Bestselling author recently told me that you don't make any money until book #5. I'm paraphrasing:

"Don't quick your day job until you have five books in print, on the shelves. That's when you've earned out your advance and the royalties start. That's when your publisher will start pushing your books harder. Paperbacks are the important thing."

Since I knew he had a (reported) 120k print run in hardcover, I politely told him he was full of shit.

"I only sold through about 60k books in hardcover. That didn't make a dent in my advance. The paperbacks are the money makers."

The author went on to describe how small the advances were for his first few books. Years later, they have all been in multiple printings, and have long earned out their meager advances.

"Hardcovers are nothing but an advertisement for the paperbacks," he said.

I can understand his logic. A hardcover has a shelf life of less than a year —- and usually has only four months (average) to make a sales dent. But while this hardcover is taking up the coop space on the new release tables, it's signaling to people to check out this author's other books; books that have been selling for years.

While a hardcover can make money, the book usually doesn't get into a royalty situation until the paperback is released. Each year, the publisher's marketing dollars push the new hardcover, which reminds people about the backlist.

My royalty statements confirm this. As of my statement of June 2006, both **Whiskey Sour** and **Bloody Mary** have earned out their advances. They did this on the paperback releases.

Unfortunately, I won't see any royalties until next year, because of basketing. Basketing is a form of joint accounting. When books are basketed in a contract, the publisher doesn't pay out royalties until all of the books have earned out. So the earnings from Whiskey and Bloody are paying the advance for **Rusty Nail.** Which is fine. By next year, I should be in a royalty situation. This is a good thing.

Royalties are like found money. You're earning on work you did years ago. Your publisher also likes royalties. They no longer have to spend marketing dollars on your backlist, but it keeps generating income. Earning out an advance is a good indicator that the book made a profit, and the longer it stays in print, the more profitable it becomes.

But how does someone stay in print? What are the minimum sales that have to be reached each year to keep a book on the shelf? I confess that I have no idea. I'm guessing it varies. But I can make an educated guess on why books stay in print.

First, there has to be a demand. This demand is fueled by old fans and new readers. Word of mouth is important.

Second, your publisher needs to be behind you. They are the ones with the deep pockets who can market you effectively, helping to establish your brand. They are also the ones who decide when to pull the plug.

Third, there should be growth. Steadily rising print runs, and corresponding sales, make everyone happy. As my friend said, hardcovers do sell the backlist. And the bigger the hardcover, the bigger the marketing campaign, the likelier backlist books will sell.

By book #6, I'm hoping to have a dump box (also called a cameo.) These are the stand alone cardboard displays featuring six different books all by the same author. These sell books like crazy. They also cost your publisher a mint, in both corrugation (the cost of the stands) and coop (the price of the real estate they occupy.)

We all hear the stories of the new authors who signed a huge deal and get a gigantic print run and marketing campaign. This is a great thing when it happens, but it's also a gamble.

Building up an author's fanbase with modest print runs and a solid backlist is a safer way to make money. Slow and steady wins the race. And it stands to reason that if your backlist is earning money, there will be more money available to promote your recently released title. Once you're in a royalty situation, you're no longer a gamble —you're a sure thing.

At least, until demand drops off. That's where you come in.

I've heard a lot of authors talk about the insanity of doing an 8 hour store signing, handselling books to everyone who walks in the bookstore. "I could never do that," they say.

They also say that visiting 500 bookstores in a summer is even crazier. They talk about how their time is better spent writing. They talk about their shyness. They talk about how it's the publishers job to sell books. They say that if they just write a really good book, it will find an audience.

But they're overlooking a major plus of self-promotion; once you're in a royalty situation, every book you sell is making you money. The more you sell, the more you earn. And it's exponential —if you sell one book to a customer, that customer can buy your backlist, your future books, and tell everyone they know about you.

You're not working for free. You get a check. And the effort you put in will sell books above and beyond what would have normally sold.

Is it what you signed on for when you became a writer? No. But if you'd like to be doing this as a career, and someday hope to make a decent living (or a wealthy living) writing books, perhaps you should reconsider your priorities and what you're truly capable of doing.

I've said, from the very beginning of my career, that my goal is to make money for my publisher.

For my first two books, I'm doing just that. It will be interesting to see where it takes me.

33 comments

Worry By Numbers

When I'm not checking my Amazon rankings every ten minutes, or Googling myself, I call Ingram.

Ingram is a distributor. They're the one (I believe) that supplies Amazon with books, along with many chains and independent stores who special order from them. You can call their automated stock status number at 615.213.6803 and punch in an ISBN to listen to sales figures from this year and last year.

One of JA's big publishing rules is to never compare yourself to other writers. It isn't productive, and can drive you nuts.

Since it's my rule, I'm allowed to break it, so I spent a half hour on Ingram comparing my numbers to numbers of my peers.

This is hardly scientific, and not an accurate indicator of how many books I'm selling vs. how many they are selling. The big box stores (Walmart, Costco) aren't supplied by Ingram, and the chain stores get most of their stock and most of their orders through their own warehouses.
Still, publishing is all about numbers, and I wanted to see if my Ingram numbers were decent or crummy compared to people in the same genre.

Here are my results. These numbers are all for this year only, and are already suspect because many of these books were released at different times during the year. But this isn't science, it's petty envy, so we'll go with what we have.

I'm also going to mention coop, which is front of store placement. The paperback of Bloody Mary received coop. Rusty Nail did not.

- WHISKEY SOUR paperback (PB) – 994
- BLOODY MARY (PB) - 675 (coop)
- RUSTY NAIL hardcover (HC)- 1395

Just looking at these figures, I was surprised that my older paperback was outselling my new paperback. But I know it isn't —-this is just the Ingram sales. The chains have already stocked many copies of Bloody Mary, and sold these rather than ordering from Ingram. Figuring that this would be the same situation for other authors, I began to check their numbers.

AUTHOR #1 hasn't hit the NYT list yet, but is on track to. Like all the other writers in this half-assed study, they write a mystery/thriller series. Here's how their backlist and new hardcover have sold so far this year.

- Book #1 (PB) – 960
- Book #2 (PB) – 655

- Book #3 (PB) -641
- Book #4 (PB) - 979 (major coop)
- Book #5 (HC) - 2087 (major coop and discount)

AUTHOR #1's latest hardcover has gone into several printings. They aren't in any big box stores, so these numbers are mostly indies, Amazon, and special orders.

AUTHOR #2 has been on the NYT list with their last three paperback originals (no hardcover releases.) These books were all released within a short time of each other.

- Book #1 (PBO) - 3147 (major coop)
- Book #2 (PBO) - 2683 (major coop)
- Book #3 (PBO) - 2303 (major coop)

AUTHOR #2 has damn good numbers, especially considering that this author IS in the big box stores, and is already well stocked by the chains. If we were trying to be scientific about this, being in a big box store means that Ingram numbers amount to less of a percentage of total sales than those authors who aren't in big boxes.

AUTHOR #3 got about the same size advance as I did, and is on the same publishing schedule as I am. No big box stores, and not much coop as far as I know.

- Book #1 (PB) – 164
- Book #2 (PB) - 288 (minor coop)
- Book #3 (HC) - 585

I know that AUTHOR #3 had a much larger first printing of his first novel than I did, but I sold better.

AUTHOR #4 just had their second book in the series come out. This author got a smaller advance and print run than I did, but is still with a big publisher. No coop, far as I know.

- Book #1 (PB) – 153
- Book #2 (HC) - 352

AUTHOR #5 just had their second series book come out. This author got a smaller advance and print run than I did, but is still with a big publisher.

- Book #1 (PB) - 247 (minor coop)
- Book #2 (HC) 521

AUTHOR #6 is a NYT bestseller, and has been for many books. This author is in the big box stores.

- Book #1 (PB) – 606
- Book #2 (PB) – 429
- Book #3 (PB) – 350
- Book #4 (PB) – 317
- Book #5 (PB) - 2273 (major coop)
- Book #6 (HC) - 3179 (major coop and discount)

AUTHOR #7 made the NYT list once, but hasn't in the last few books. These are all paperback originals. These are in the big box stores.

- Book #1 (PBO) - 0 (out of print)
- Book #2 (PBO) - 275
- Book #3 (PBO) - 183
- Book #4 (PBO) - 179
- Book #5 (PBO) - 193
- Book #6 (PBO_ - 564
- Book #7 (PBO) - 1898 (minor coop)

AUTHOR #8 is a NYT bestseller. The sixth book in the series was just released in hardcover yesterday. The latest paperback has been out for 2 weeks. These are in the big box stores.

- Book #1 (PB) - 412
- Book #2 (PB) - 336
- Book #3 (PB) - 324
- Book #4 (PB) - 372
- Book #5 (PB) - 1333 (major coop)
- Book #6 (HC) - 2865

AUTHOR #9 is a big top 5 NYT bestseller. Ten books in the series so far. The first book was just rereleased this year with major coop. In the big box stores.

- Book #1 (PB) - 3256 (major coop)
- Book #2 (PB) - 298

- Book #3 (PB) - 244
- Book #4 (PB) - 292
- Book #5 (PB) - 307
- Book #6 (PB) - 1620 (major coop/dump box)
- Book #7 (PB) - 1394 (major coop/dump box)
- Book #8 (PB) - 1495 (major coop/dump box)
- Book #9 (PB) - 4454 (major coop/dump box)
- Book #10 (HC) - 9065 (major coop and discount)

AUTHOR #10 is a NYT bestseller with eight books so far. Like Author #9, the publisher paid for coop in a dump box (a big cardboard display with the books face out.

- Book #1 (PB) - 657 (major coop/dump box)
- Book #2 (PB) - 708 (major coop/dump box)
- Book #3 (PB) - 653 (major coop/dump box)
- Book #4 (PB) - 619 (major coop/dump box)
- Book #5 (PB) - 731 (major coop/dump box)
- Book #6 (PB) - 778 (major coop/dump box)
- Book #7 (PB) - 9005 (major coop/dump box)
- Book #8 (HC) - 5788 (major coop and discount)

AUTHOR #11 started at the same time I did, had a bigger advance and more coop.

- Book #1 (PB) - 249
- Book #2 (PB) - 383 (major coop)
- Book #3 (HC) - 797 (major coop)

AUTHOR #12 started at the same time as I did and had a seven figure advance and a huge marketing campaign.

- BOOK #1 (PB) - 261
- BOOK #2 (PB) - 404 (major coop)

AUTHOR #13 started at the same time I did, with a big publisher.

- BOOK #1 (PB) - 253
- BOOK #2 (HC) - 195

AUTHOR #14 started a year before me, won a bunch of awards, lots of coop.

- BOOK #1 (PB) - 1118
- BOOK #2 (PB) - 570
- BOOK #3 (PB) - 1227
- BOOK #4 (HC) - 1716

AUTHOR #15 started the same year as I did. Major publisher, no coop that I noticed.

- BOOK #1 (PB) - 664
- BOOK #2 (HC) - 1262

We can analyze these numbers however we choose, but we really can't make any blanket statements because this is hardly a controlled experiment and we can't get even a rough estimate of how Ingram sales factor into overall sales. I can make a few assumptions, however.

1. Coop sells books, and it seems to have a trickle down effect on Ingram.

2. Major bestsellers don't move a lot of backlist titles through Ingram, unless coop is involved.

3. Discounts sell books.

Now comes a chicken/egg/cart/horse dilemma. Do the books that sell well have a demand that fuels the supply, or does supply fuel demand, or a bit of both?

In many cases, aside from the newest paperback and hardcover, the first book in the series seems to sell the best. I'd say this is a result of browsing, as coop wasn't involved except in one case. Those who get hooked on the series will move through the next few books in the series, and then when the new book comes out, all of these fans that have acrued over the years buy it, causing a bestseller. Which leads to:

4. The longer you survive, the better you'll do.

I can also glean another assumption out of these numbers, because I know AUTHOR #1 and this person does almost as much self-promotion as I do.

5. The author can make a difference.

Getting your name out there, and meeting fans and booksellers, can only help your cause. Being discovered by browsing isn't going to lead to bestsellerdom —look how few books NYT authors sell without coop behind them.

But if a bookseller recommends you, or fans seek you out, you'll have a better shot of lasting longer in this business. Your best shot at success is having a publisher willing to plunk down major coop bucks, but if you build a steady fanbase and your backlist continues to sell, your publisher might very well decide to push you to the next level. In fact, they may be waiting to push you to the next level.

I used to believe that publishing was all about spaghetti theory: publishers would throw books at the wall to see which one sticks. But now I'm thinking it is more like growing a garden. Careers are cultivated. Some may grow like crazy without much help. Some may die no matter how much help they are given. But the longer the garden stays alive, the more attached the gardener becomes. The more attention the gardener pays, the bigger the garden gets. In the end, the prize roses get the best fertilizer —-but it can't hurt to do a little fertilizing on your own.

Oh, and tend to your own garden, no matter how nice your neighbor's is.

38 comments

How the Hell Am I Doing?!?

If you've got a book on the shelves, you're probably haunted by an omnipresent question:

Am I doing OK or not?

In almost any other job, you get evaluated. There is a pay scale that usually correlates to years of experience. The harder you work, the likelier you are to be promoted. You're constantly getting feedback on whether you're doing well or not.

This isn't the case with writers.

There are reasons for this.

1. Every book is unique, and treated differently than every other book, so comparing yourself to other authors does little to no good.
2. You get very little feedback from your publisher, and when they do give you feedback, it's usually sugar-coated, vague, or even a lie. You never know for sure how happy they are with you, or how disappointed.
3. You don't have access to all of the sales numbers, and those you have access to don't tell you much about your publisher's expectations and if they've been met.
4. Everything you do to promote seems to have very little effect, and there's no direct correlation between hard work and success.
5. Royalty statements and advance checks aren't effective evaluations because they don't list expectations.

In short, writers don't have much control over their careers, and they're kept in the dark about so much that promotion seems almost pointless.

A better business model would have the publisher keeping the writer in the fiscal loop. They tell you how much money they've spent on everything, how many books need to sell before the book makes money, and how many books need to sell to make them happy.

But very few publishers do this. And often our agents can't even tell us if our publishers are happy with our performance. Often our *publishers* can't even tell us, because sales has a different answer than production who has a different answer than accounting.

Like pornography, success has no specific definition, but we supposedly know it when we see it.

Since writers already have a right-brained artist mentality, the lack of specific goals and appropriate feedback can quickly and easily add to the neuroses pile.

We all want to do better, but we really have no idea how we're doing now.

We all have worries, but no way to quell them.

We search for answers, but only find more questions.

So how the hell are we supposed to function in this septic environment?

Here's your mantra:

1. Live in the present, and don't worry about the future.

2. Try your best, because that's all you have control over.

3. Learn as much as you can about this business, and set goals accordingly.

Unfortunately, there still aren't any pats on the head. So when you're looking for acceptance and approval, look to the readers rather than the industry professionals. Look to peers rather than at your royalty statement. Look to family and friends.

It's an imperfect business in an imperfect world, but worrying about it won't chance a damn thing.

Keep on keeping on, my friends.

13 comments

Reader Expectations

What you bring to the party can often determine how much fun the party is.

Let's look at HANNIBAL RISING, which was released today.

I read RED DRAGON back in 1984, and then SILENCE OF THE LAMBS when it came out in 1988. These books blew me away, and are largely the reason I write serial killer fiction.

Harris scared the crap out of me, and Lecter was the most terrifying character every created. A soulless intellectual sadist, whose manipulations frightened because they hinted at —-and eventually revealed —-violence and pure evil.

Then HANNIBAL came out. I hated HANNIBAL. In fact, hate wasn't strong enough a word. It was the first book I reviewed on Amazon, and the only book I ever gave one star.

My reasons were simple: Harris had taken the ultimate boogeyman and turned him into a silly hero. By giving Lecter a backstory, and sketchy motivation for his atrocities, Harris turned a terrifying character who haunted two masterpieces into a cartoonish allegory for Epicureanism. Lecter's taste for fine things, and the reveal that he only ate rude people, was not being true to the character in the prior books.

To make matters worse, Harris wasted Clarice as a hero, made much of the book a boring travelogue, added a gratuitous body-building lesbian to the mix, and topped it off with a lidless pedophile who giggled at the thought of pigs eating Lector's feet.

Quite a fall from SOTL and RD. And quite a disappointment for me, and millions of others who wanted to see Will Graham and Clarice Starling team up to catch Lecter.

So I had zero hope for HANNIBAL RISING, but putz that I am, went out and bought it the day it was released.

And it wasn't bad.

Here's the problem I'm wrestling with. Compared to RD and SOTL, HANNIBAL RISING isn't in the same league. It's certainly not scary —-I don't think it can even be called a thriller.

Compared to HANNIBAL, it's a much better book, not only the plot, but the actual writing. No cartoonish villains here. No long and boring exposition. And there is an actual plot, and no character rings false (like Barney and Clarice in the previous book.)

Looking back at my feelings about HANNIBAL, much of the reason I hated it so much was that Harris let me down. He failed to meet expectations, and then betrayed his characters. IMO, he also betrayed his readers. It seemed as if Harris had fallen in love with Lecter, and had tried to redeem his character's actions in the first two books by justifying them with unsatisfying backstory and motivation. In HANNIBAL, Harris essentially said that "The shark from Jaws was really a good guy, once you got to know him."

Had I read HANNIBAL without reading SOTL and RD, perhaps I would have admired Harris's gutsy vision of serial killer as good guy. I still don't think HANNIBAL would be a good book, but I wouldn't get angry thinking about the 11 years I spent waiting to see what happened after SOTL.

So I tried to read HANNIBAL RISING without expectations, and pretend that Lecter was a brand new character. This is a trick I also do with the last three Star Wars movies.

It worked, and on it's own terms HANNIBAL RISING is pretty good.

The plot isn't complicated. This is a simple revenge story. An eight-year-old Lecter and his family are victims of war crimes, and he grows up a sociopath and goes after those who wronged him.

The writing is clean and sharp, and often lovely. While there isn't a lot of tension in the narrative, it did hold me. The ending wasn't the catastrophe that HANNIBAL was, and the book even managed to prompt a grin or two.

If this was just a book I picked up without knowing anything about it, I would have judged it pretty good.

So that's how I'm going to rate it. Three stars, pretty good.

Will this give you the thrills and chills of Harris's early work? No. The story is pretty straight forward, and you don't relate to any character, even the abused young Hannibal, because he is is emotionless, pitiless, and not dynamic.

Will it give you more insight into the evil genius that is Hannibal Lecter? No, because I still can't reconcile the Lector of RD and SOTL with the Lector of these last two novels.

Is it awful? No. There's some good writing here, and the story moves along briskly.

HANNIBAL RISING won't rise to your expectations, if you're hoping for a return to Harris's early style. But it isn't bad.

Which makes me to the point of this blog entry. Expectations play a big part in if a reader enjoys a book. If you come in expecting to be thrilled, you might be disappointed. If you come in expecting crap, you may be pleasantly surprised.

I've gotten a few reviews for Rusty Nail, harping on the fact that Jack keeps getting chased by serial killers. How many times can one person be the target of madmen?

Good point.

But in DIRTY MARTINI, I have no serial killers, and now I'm concerned my readership is going to say, "We expected serial killers —-where are the serial killers?"

As writers, I believe we owe our readers something. We have to walk a line between giving them more of what they liked, and giving them something new.

We also have to be true to our characters, because once we create a character, that character takes on a life of their own. Hannibal Lecter, or Spenser, or Kay Scarpetta, or Alex Cross, or Jack Daniels, have readers who have specific ideas of how these characters should act, and what types of stories they should be involved in.

I can't expect my readers to give me the same break I gave HANNIBAL RISING. I have to remember why they became my fans in the first place, and respect their expectations.

If you're a writer, you should do the same. Though it really hasn't hurt Thomas Harris's career much...

42 comments

First Three Weeks

The first few weeks after your book is released, you won't be sleeping much.

Part of that will be worry. But most if it will be hustle.

If you (or your publicist, or both of you) laid the groundwork prior to your release, you'll have several weeks of traveling, speaking, and interviews. Your editor and agent will be sending you reviews. Your emails will triple. You'll be running around frantically trying to stay on top of everything.

Your publisher wants you to push as hard as you can, because they believe the first few weeks in a book's life are the most important. They want to get you on the bestseller list. They want the coop placement they bought to earn out.

While that's understandable, I also believe it is short-sighted. Here are the reasons why:

1. Slow and steady wins the race. Sure, selling a lot of books the first few weeks looks good. And that's what the marketing dollars are used for. But building a readership is a marathon, and you can't sprint the first mile and hope to keep up that pace. Word of mouth takes time to build.

When your new book comes out, you're trying to remind your previous fans to buy it, and you're trying to find new fans. How many new fans do you think you will find you during the three weeks your book is being pushed, vs. the forty-nine weeks that your book has no coop?

I'm voting that you have the potential to find more fans in those forty-nine weeks, with your backlist, your appearances, and your internet presence. You also have the potential to sell more books in those forty-nine weeks than in the first three.

I can understand why your publisher only pushes for three weeks —it's a monetary decision. But they shouldn't stop caring the rest of the year, or be disappointed if your book has a slow start. A sale is a sale, no matter when it comes. Wanting your sales to be top-loaded for the first few weeks causes a lot of undue stress and unrealistic expectations.

2. You can't make a difference anyway. Let's say your publisher is hoping for a shot at the NYT List. So they send you to a new city every day for 21 days. The tour is hectic and expensive, and what's the most they could hope for?

Even if you're a bestseller already, moving 200 hardcovers per event is a huge amount. Chances are you'll sell under 50. But even if you sell 200, in a week's worth of tremendous effort you only managed to sell 2100 books.

Yes, 1400 is a lot, but I doubt it will be the tipping point to get you on the Times list. First of all, that assumes everyone who buys a book at a signing is a brand new fan who wouldn't have bought it otherwise (if they would have bought it anyway, why waste the time and money?) Second, that extra 1400 probably won't be the difference between making the list and missing the list. The numbers needed to make the

NYT List are very high, and an extra thousand books probably won't be enough. Patterson sells 60,000 of his new hardcover a week.

3. It's not this year that counts. Actually, how well your new book does has less to do with your current promotion and more to do with your prior promotion. If you spent the previous forty-nine weeks accruing and prepping a readership, then you can announce a new book during your three week sprint and sell X number of copies, because you have a group that already knows you. Running around for three weeks trying to find new readers is much harder to do, and not very effective unless you have a huge media buzz.

4. The numbers game. Publishers care about numbers. But it seems that everyone is looking at the first numbers, and if they don't meet expectations they give up hope.

Why is it that important things like a second printing, or consistent sales, or earning out an advance, aren't even mentioned to the author? We hear it immediately if we get a review or make a bestseller list, but isn't your paperback going back to press for the third time also a cause for celebration? When your book finally begins to earn royalties, isn't that even more important than being on some bestseller list? But no one tells you this when it happens.

It seems that the numbers have to be front-loaded to be impressive.

This is the Hollywood blockbuster mentality, where you spend 150 million and hope to make 200 million. Doesn't it make more sense to spend 50 thousand and make 100 thousand? Do books have to sell millions of copies in order to be successful? Isn't the publisher making a profit more important than them making a killing? Especially since so many of these blockbusters lose money?

I recognize the importance of the first three weeks. But I don't believe that's where all the emphasis should be. Winning teams usually aren't created overnight. It takes years of training, fine-tuning, coaching, and adjusting to get a winning ball team. Sports owners know this. I wonder why publishers don't seem to.

25 comments

To Be a NYT Bestseller

The bestseller lists aren't easy to break into. But there is a method, sort of, provided your publisher is on your side, you're in the right place at the right time, and you're primed and ready to take your career to the next level.

Or not. New York Times Bestsellardom can happen without any effort on your part. Conversely, every effort on your part may not lead to bestsellerdom.

Let's start with what I know:

There are a limited number of NYT reporting stores. Some are bookstores. Some are chains like Wal-Mart, Costco, and Sam's Club. To debut on the list, you have to have a certain "magic" number of preorders, but not always.

This magic number changes, depending on the competition. You can theoretically get on the list by only selling a few thousand books your first week, provided no one is selling better than that.

The NYT collects data from reporting stores by using a survey. The survey lists the top predictions of the NYT, based on orders and units shipped, and the employee at the store writes in how many they sold next to the pre-printed title. If a title is selling well, but isn't pre-printed on the survey, it can be written in.

Since non-traditional outlets (supermarkets, convenience stores) actually sell more books than bookstores, having your book available through the major chains is essential to make the list. If Wal-Mart commits to buying 80,000 copies your your hardcover, chances are good you'll be pre-printed on the survey, which guarantees a spot on the list.

There is a self-fulfilling prophecy in effect. Rather than demand driving quantity, quantity (with marketing, promotion, and advertising behind it) can indeed drive demand. In short, books shipped indeed become books sold, even without customer pre-orders. The NYT assumes this, so a book can debut on the list even though a single copy hasn't been officially sold, and authors can know where their book will debut on the list weeks before it hits the stores.

Then, once a book is on the bestseller list, it will sell better because it was on the bestseller list, which can leader to a higher spot on the list next week as more people become aware of the book.

It's a flawed system that doesn't rely on actual copies sold, but I've noticed that NYT bestsellers all appear to have some commonalities.

1. There are a lot of copies in print. For fiction, my sources have told me that a minimum first hardcover printing of 80k, and a minimum paperback printing of 250k, are the starting points. There's a lot of leeway, but these are solid numbers, that if spread out through the reporting stores (including non-traditional outlets) will give you a shot at the list.

2. The titles are high profile. This means publisher coop is in play, and the books are prominently displayed in the store. Up front, near the register, in the window, in an individual dump box or cardboard cameo, on end caps. Books that face out sell better. Books that are displayed in quantity sell better still.
3. A backlist exists. While debuting on the NYT list with a first books is possible, in most cases the list is dominated by people who have been on it before. These authors were grown, over a period of books and years, until their audience was large enough to justify the large print runs necessary to get on the list. An in-print backlist is essential to growing an author for two reasons. First, because the more books that are available, the likelier the author is to be discovered and read. ARCS, libraries, remainders, and used book sales are essential to this. Second, because a strong backlist is like found money for a publisher. They've already had the first printing, and have spent the marketing dollars. If a book goes into multiple printings, it shows the publisher the book has an audience, and is continuing to make money. This money can then be used for:

   A big advertising, marketing, and publicity campaign. While I contend that real estate (prominent coop placement) and number of copies in print are the most important precursors to bestsellerdom, an expensive marketing campaign, backed by a publicity tour, says to bookstores and supermarkets: the publisher is spending big money, the author is or will be famous, and there will be a demand for this book so we better order a lot of them. Then the self-fulfilling prophecy begins. There have been cases where a huge advance and ad campaign, with lots of author appearances on TV and radio, was enough to generate a bestseller. There have also been cases where this backfired, and everyone lost a lot of money.

4. Word of mouth. This is still key. All the ads in the world won't help a book that people don't talk about or don't like. Recommendations still sell books. And once a reader becomes brand loyal, they usually are for life. Often, the word of mouth can begin within the publishing house itself, with employees getting excited about a new book. In house enthusiasm leads to a bigger push by the sales reps, a higher print run, and more promo dollars to back up that printing. A large foreign sale (or a large book club sale, as **Tess Gerritsen** points out in her latest blog) frees up some advertising dollars, because now there is less risk because money has already been earned on the book.

So can bestsellers be created? There are, all the time. But it's a lot like betting on horses. The ones who win are the ones who usually keeping winning, and longshots rarely come in. It's tough to get a publisher to bet on a longshot. They've all gotten burned before, and are wary of it happening again. So they play it safe, until the moment seems right.

Along with the self-fulfilling prophecy of "the more books that are printed, the more that will sell" there's also a catch 22 of "your publisher only prints as many as the last one sold."

Bookstores look at numbers. If a title sold poorly, the next title from that author won't have as many orders, dooming it to sell even less. You want your numbers to go up, but if your publisher prints a gazillion copies, hoping to make the NYT list, and the books doesn't sell, you're career is pretty much over.

That's why you've gotta work your butt off self-promoting.

Your efforts won't get you on the NYT list (unless you're a celebrity.) But they will help your sell-through, help you keep your backlist in print, help you build a brand and name-recognition, help you develop a fanbase, and most of all, *make your publisher money.* The more money they make, the more they realize the money they *could* make if you're a bestseller.

To recap, the essential elements of bestsellerdom are:

- A large print run, so you're pre-printed on the NYT survey
- Getting into non-traditional outlets like Wal-Mart
- Coop placement for displays

Almost as essential are:

- An in-print backlist and track record
- Advertising, marketing, and publicity
- Word of mouth

Of course, these aren't the only factors. A movie release could catapult a book onto the list. So could current events, or the stars aligning. No one truly knows. Of the current top **15 fiction bestsellers**, 14 of them have been bestsellers previously, and the 15th, **Sara Gruen**, has had much critical acclaim for her earlier work, and her latest is a powerhouse. There are no newbies on the list.

And you'll notice Patricia Cornwell on the list again. If you check the **Amazon reviews** for her latest, At Risk, you'll witness a skewering akin to a public execution. Readers do not like her new book. But it's selling like crazy. I haven't read it, so I can't comment, but it does beg the question, "How important is quality?" and the even bigger question, "How important is negative word of mouth?" The answer, for both, seems to be "Not very." It hasn't hurt Cornwell's career in the least.

So what can you, the author, do to get on the list? The same things you've been doing all along. Write the best book you can, then promote it to the best of your ability, and hope for lightening to strike.

I'm fond of saying that getting lucky is hard work. I stand by this. The more you do, the greater your chance of success.

But if I'm not a bestseller by my tenth book, I'm shooting myself in the head.

22 comments

Publishing Myths

Let's get provocative.

Some many newbie writers come into the publishing biz with preconceptions of how it works.

Strangely, these myths persist even with seasoned writers.

Keep in mind that there is no right and wrong/black and white in publishing. No one knows for sure what works, how to become successful, or the magic formula to hit the bestseller list. There's a lot of bravado, a lot of big ideas, and a lot of finger pointing. What works for one writer or book may not work for another.

That said, I've noticed that a lot of writers repeat the same mantras over and over again (this writer included) so let's look at some of them.

Myth #1: My Publisher Does Nothing for My Book. Authors lament their lack of advertising or reviews or tours. They're quick to blame their publishers for the lack of publicity-and ultimately sales.

Chances are your publisher does a lot of things that you aren't even aware of. That's because publishers don't keep authors in the loop. Why? Consider that people in the publishing biz treat it like any nine to five job. They don't have the same emotionally vested interest in your book as you do. Plus, publishers have dealt with many writers in the past, and can easily classify writers as "needy, clueless, and egomaniacal" which a lot of writers are. The stereotype fits.

So you may not know about the ARCS printed and sent to bookstores and reviewers. You may not know about all the trade shows your publisher attends, pimping their catalog (with your book in it.) You may not know anything about coop deals, or the sales meetings, or the marketing meetings, or the brainstorming sessions that were devoted entirely to you.

No publisher wants to lose money on a book. Just because you believe your publisher is doing nothing, doesn't mean they are. Hell, if they got you on the shelf at a few bookstores, that alone takes a monumental effort.

Myth #2: All I Have to Do is Write a Great Book. Don't get me wrong —you DO have to write a great book. But a great book doesn't mean the world will embrace it, or even be able to find it among the 200,000 released every year.

Writers believe that they have very little control over their sales. They do, however, have control over writing the book. So it's an easy defense mechanism (to protect one's own sanity) to believe that focusing on the writing and not the business stuff can lead to success.

It can. And has, many times. But there are more good books that aren't successful than vice versa.

Publishers truly believe that ALL the books they publish are great. And every book ever traditionally published is *someone's* favorite book. Greatness is subjective. You can have the greatest book in the world, but that doesn't mean people are going to buy it, or even realize it exists.

Once you're a writer, you become the CEO of your own business. The more you understand how the business works, the more you can and should do to succeed.
Does that mean you should be doing promotion at the expense of writing time? No. Writing should always come first. But (unfortunately) your book's best spokesperson is you. Ignore that at your own peril.

Myth #3: It's My Publisher's Job to Sell My Book. I really dislike the 'us against them' mentality that many authors have. I understand that many of them have reached this conclusion legitimately. Publishers can screw authors. They can kill books, and even careers. But to think that the publisher is some evil empire bent on exploiting your hard work and then counting their money and laughing while you fail — well, that's silly.

Publishers want to make money. They believe they have somewhat of an idea who to do that. Sometimes they're correct. Often they aren't. But in no case is your book more important to your publisher than it is to you.

It's your name on the spine. And here is an IRREFUTABLE FACT: The more you self-promote, the more books you'll sell.

A certain number *will* sell without you doing anything. Sometimes that number is large enough to make the book successful. The writer will take credit for writing a good book, the publisher will take credit for the brilliant promotional campaign they created, and perhaps both (or neither) is correct.

But you *will* sell more books if you're out there, promoting.

Myth #4: Self-Promotion Will Make Me Successful. There is no evidence to say that investing a great deal of time in promotional will lead to success (any more than writing a good book will lead to success.) I know several writers who are tireless in their promotional efforts. Some of them are bestsellers. Some of them aren't, and there's no guarantee their efforts will ever pay off.

Many self-promotional efforts are pointless, because the writer doesn't know what they're doing. And even the successful efforts rarely yield a response large enough to justify the time and money used.

It's true that the more you self promote, the more books you'll sell. But it may not be enough to attain stardom (or even stay afloat.)

Myth #5: Hard Work Leads to Success. Successful people all mention "struggle" and "overcoming odds" and "80 hour work weeks" and "living for the job" when explaining to others their journey to the top.

I don't deny that they worked hard. But I know that many people who work very hard don't ever succeed.

It's a basic fact of human nature that we seek cause and effect. Wisdom is simply learning from experience —doing things and judging their results. But wisdom isn't foolproof, and it is always subjective.

Luck plays a huge part in all of our lives. But not many people attribute success to luck, because luck is something beyond their control. To believe that how talented you are, or how hard you work, has nothing to do with how well you will do in life, can make you feel powerless and paranoid.

So we cling to the things we have control over, and then attribute our successes to those things.

Myth #6: My Agent, Editor, Publisher, Peers Know What They're Doing. Actually, nobody knows what they're doing. Everyone in this biz has ideas that seem to be working, strategies that they follow, but deep down all of the people you go to for advice are just as insecure and clueless as you are.

Question everything, including yourself. Learn as much as you can. Your opinions should be based on your experience, not anyone else's experience.

Observe. Listen. Experiment. Be flexible, and always open to new ideas. And keep chugging away.

Myth #7: I'll Be Happy When... When I finish my book. When I sell my first short story. When I sell my tenth article. When I land an agent. When I sell a novel. When I sign a three book deal. When I make 100k a book. When I have ten books in print. When I hit the NYT bestseller list. When I hit #1 on the NYT bestseller list. When I stay #1 for ten weeks on the NYT bestseller list. When I sell the movie rights. When the movie is made. When the movie wins best picture. When I win the Pulitzer. And so on.

I don't know if you'll ever be successful. I don't know if I'll ever be successful. I'm not even sure what the definition of 'success' is, because it's changed a dozen times for me in the past few years.

Another trait of humans is to never be satisfied. Once satisfaction happens, there are no more goals to achieve, which really cuts into productivity.

I've been happy many times in my career, but the happiness never lasts. Once goals are met, they're replaced by others. I don't think it's possible to reach a point where you can be at peace with this business. All you can do is try your best, celebrate successes no matter how small, learn from failures, roll with the punches, and save your money for the day when you no longer have a career.

Myth #8: This Business Sucks. Publishing, as a business model, is wasteful and ineffective. It's hard to break into. It's harder to stay in than break in. It's hardest of all to be successful. There is so much out of your control, and no guarantees. The odds are against you, and everyone working in the biz will tell you how difficult it is, and they're right.

It's also the greatest career in the world.

30 comments

The Great Bookstore Experiment

Fellow writers, let us band together and share information for the common good.

I've learned a lot about the bookselling buiness by working as a bookseller, asking questions of booksellers, and observing over 1000 bookstores.

By my count, there are about 680 Walden/Borders Express stores, about 550 Borders stores, and about 600 Barnes & Nobles. My numbers may be off —stores open and close all the time. I'm not sure how many large indie stores there are, or how many Books A Million. If anyone has more accurate numbers, please share them.

By my count, the Mystery/Thriller Section in a chain store averages 250 different authors (authors, not titles). Bigger stores have more, smaller stores have less.

I've hung out in bookstores for hours at a time. I've lurked in the Mystery section, waiting to pounce on anyone who browses there. I've done this at all times of day, all over the country, every day of the week.

And I'm concerned.

Maybe it's a *watched pot never boils* situation, but I don't see a lot of people buying mysteries.

Sometimes an hour will go by and no one even enters the section. Sometimes a reader will beeline straight for Harlan Coben, grab one, and be on her way ten seconds later. But I don't see a lot of browsing, and I don't see a lot of buying —-especially hardcovers.

Booksellers have told me that a face-out book has an eight times better chance of selling than a spine-out book. And I know that a bookstore may only receive three or less copies of a new mystery, keep them on the shelf for three to five months, and then still return copies because they didn't sell. It's possible that your new hardcover may only be selling one copy in five months, per location.

I know booksellers read my blog, and I'd like to ask a question of them. How many customers does your store average per day? And what percentage of that is mystery sales? Feel free to post anonymously.

And for you mystery writers, give me three hours of your time. This is for your benefit as well. Go to your local bookstore, get a cup of coffee, pull out a notepad, and watch the mystery section. Count how many people browse the mystery section, and how many people leave with a book. Then post that info here. Include store, location, and time of day. If you're eagle-eyed, include the book title the customers bought.

What is the point of this experiment?

I'm not sure that writers understand how much the odds are stacked against them.

I spoke to a lot of booksellers on my last tour. And at least a hundred of them —even though they weren't supposed to —shared how many of my books had sold that year. The stores that knew me and supported

me have sold between 50 and 180 of my books this year alone. The majority have sold less than ten. Some haven't sold a single book.

I'm guessing that a midlist mystery author might average one sale every two weeks, per location, if they only have a few books in stock and no coop placement.

I have no idea if I'm right or not, but I think I am.

I hope everyone who reads this blog gives this experiment a try. If you don't want to spend that long in a bookstore playing spy, but you are friends with a bookstore employee or manager, ask them how many customers they have per day vs. how many mysteries sold.

If you're a writer, ignorance isn't bliss. It's death. If a customer isn't directly seeking out your book —because they read a review, or had it recommended to them, or learned about it somehow —then the only chance you have of selling it is to a browser, and there aren't that many browsers. Seven paperbacks on the new release tower might have a shot at selling a few by chance. A single hardcover spine-out in the Mystery section has very little chance of selling by chance.

You hear me preach about the importance of meeting booksellers, of self-promotion, of establishing brand and name recognition. Invariably, many writers will tell me that promotion is up to the publisher, that writers can't make a difference, that all they need to concentrate on is writing a good book.

My response is always the same: the bookstore is filled with good books that customers walk right past. If no one knows about your book, it is going to rot on the shelf no matter how good it it.

Take three hours. Visit a bookstore. Post the numbers. Show me that I'm wrong or that I'm right.

55 comments

Remainders

This morning, I finally got *the letter*.

Dear Mr. Konrath,

We are about to offer the hardcover edition of Whiskey Sour for remainder. We will be sending you twenty-five copies gratis. You may purchase up to one hundred additional copies at the courtesy price of $2.00 per copy, plus freight. Should you wish to purchase a larger quantity, we would be happy to discuss pricing and terms. Payment must be rendered by credit card at the time of purchase.

It's been two years since Whiskey Sour came out, and since just about everything is eventually remaindered, I can't feel too badly about the situation. In fact, there are several good things about it.

Before we get to that, let's explain what remaindering actually is.

After hardcovers are printed, they're warehoused. Warehouses are very large buildings with very many shelves which hold millions of books. Even though they're huge, shelf space is still limited, and therefore valuable.

A 20 copy carton of Whiskey Sour measures 10" x 11" x 16". By using a system known as math (it apparently is still being taught in schools) we can figure out that 2000 copies of Whiskey Sour would take up some serious space: 83 feet wide, and 91 feet high. That's a lot of unsold Whiskey Sours.

After the paperback is released (or after an undetermined length of time), hardcover orders dwindle down, and the book can no longer monetarily justify the space it occupies. It's time to be remaindered.

Remaindering is selling the books at a loss, to recoup printing and shipping costs. Authors get no royalty for remaindered books. They're sold in bulk to bookstores and discount outlets for about two bucks each, and then those outlets sell them for around $2.99 to $5.99.

The discount aisle in chain bookstores are all remainders. So are those strip mall stores (usually just called BOOKS) that have tables and tables stacked high with unorganized books. Borders also has a new concept called Borders Outlet which specifically sells remainders.

So what does this mean to you, the author? A few things. Let's start with the bad.

1. You don't get paid for a remaindered book, even though it is sold.
2. That edition of the book is no longer in print, and once it's gone, it's gone forever.
3. A large number of remainders indicates the book didn't do as well as expected.
4. Being in the bargain bin has a stigma that isn't pleasant.

But there are also some positive things about being remaindered that many authors don't consider.

1. You get to buy copies of your book really cheap, but they have the potential to be very valuable later on —especially first book/first edition.

2. People will discover your series on the remainder table.
3. The more books you have in circulation, the likelier you are to be read.
4. Any book you have on a shelf —remainder or otherwise —is an advertisment for your brand.

How many books should you buy? I've spoken to many authors, and they all have told me that they wish they bought more, with a few notable exceptions. The exceptions were the authors who bought every single copy of their remainders. This is a bad move for a few reasons:

1. Where you gonna put them all, Einstein? Warehouse space costs money, remember?
2. If you horde all the books for yourself, you're missing out on the opportunity to have readers discover you on the remainder table.
3. How will you ever get rid of two thousand (or more) books? If you gave away a copy every single day, it would take you over five years to unload them all. If you're trying to sell them, to get your investment back, it will take you even longer, and every event you attend for the next ten years you'll be lugging around your books.

I've decided to buy the hundred copies, and let the rest hit the remainder shelves. I'll store these in my basement, and wait for the price to skyrocket years from now when I become a superstar (or I'll donate them to libraries as a tax write-off when my ship sinks —one of the two.)

Believe it or not, remaindering isn't the worst thing that can happen to a hardcover. Before we get to that, let's talk about shipping, and waste, and profit margin.

A $22 is sold to the bookstore for $13. If there's a distributor involved, they get a cut. That leaves $9. A $3 chunk of that gets paid to the author, and the book costs about $3 to print and ship (this number goes down depending on the size of print run, or goes up depending on the size of the book.) That leaves the publisher with a $3 profit per book... sort of.

Publishing isn't like other businesses, in that it allows returns. So if a book doesn't sell, the bookstore sends it back and gets a credit from the publisher to purchase other titles.

The book is returned to the warehouse where it is shipped again when it is ordered again —at the publisher's expense. Shipping is costly, and can be $1 per book or more.

A book can be shipped back and forth several times, and then it starts to get ripped and worn. When that happens, it can be sold at a discount as damaged, or it can be given a fresh new cover and shipped out again.

As a business model, this stinks. And the savvy among you will see that after the third back-and-forth, the publisher is no longer making a profit.

This can open up a discussion about why publishers print more copies than the market demands, but that's a blog entry for another day.

Even after a book is remaindered, and sold at a loss, it can sometimes be returned yet again. It's a wonder that publishers ever make money.

If that happens, and there are too many books left over after the remaindering, a book's final fate is assured —-the pulping machine.

When I visited the Time Warner warehouse last year, a spoke to one of the higher-ups about the pulping machine. Entire pallettes of a Stuart Woods title were being dumped into this giant machine, and the guy proudly remarked, "It pays for itself in recycled paper."

I was horrified. Horrified at the huge waste of money to print and ship those titles. Horrified at the destruction of perfectly good books. Horrified at the matter-of-fact way he spoke about this, because the pulping machine worked 9 to 5 and was rarely turned off.

Suddenly, remaindering doesn't seem all that bad...

32 comments

Backlistics

I was reorganizing my library (late Spring cleaning) and a few hours into it I was hit by a terrifying revelation.

I have about 5000 books, paperback and hardcover. More than 4500 of these books are no longer in print.

These books are dead. Completely dead. And some of them are damn good reads.

If that wasn't scary enough, a lot of my favorite authors from years past are no longer being published.

Maybe some of them have passed on. But I suspect that there's also another, more sinister reason:

They simply can't sell their latest book.

When a book is published, the writer and the publisher have big hopes for it. They want it to sell well. They want it to make money. And they probably want it to keep making money for a long time.

But the majority of books published don't get a second printing. Like comets, they have their moment, then burn out.

This is bad for the writer for several reasons. First, because an out of print book isn't likely to see print again, which means no royalties. And second, because an out of print book often indicates a lack of sales, and these numbers are tracked by publishers who won't want to buy new books from this author. It's a downward spiral.

Having your backlist in print is hugely important. Not only do your sales accrue, but so does your fan base. The longer you're on the bookshelf, the likelier you are to be discovered, and the more books you'll sell in the future.

I've heard that publishers make most of their money on backlist titles. The huge bestsellers usually cost them huge advances, and those books can take years to earn out. But a steady backlist title can be a money machine, bringing in dollars year after year without any advances paid or marketing/advertising funds required.

So why isn't more attention paid to selling the backlist?

A few bestselling authors get dump boxes or cameos or endcap shelf space, dedicated to their backlist titles. In my opinion, this is the very best use of coop dollars. Even better than being on the New Release tables and towers. This does more than push the backlist and keep it in print. This is a message to potential readers which subconsciously says "This author is obviously worth reading because he has a big expensive display, and if I like him I'll be able to read more of his books because they're all right here."

If you're a series author, keeping the first few titles in print is critical. People want to start at the beginning.

But, unfortunately, it's unlikely your publisher will push your backlist titles. Those cardboard displays are expensive to produce, and bookstore real estate doesn't come cheap either. The irony is that the writers

who get these displays are probably the ones who really don't need them, because they're already selling gazillions of copies.

Of course, it's not entirely your publisher's fault. Demand drives supply. If your books aren't selling, the bookstores won't order any more. Then they go out of print, and barring a miracle they'll stay out of print forever. Thus begins the downward spiral.

So what can you, the author, do to ensure your books stay in print?

More than you think.

Meeting Booksellers. A bookseller who likes you won't listen when the home office tells them to return a book. Instead, they'll handsell you. Last year, I met more than 1700 booksellers. I thank most of them by name in the acknowledgements of DIRTY MARTINI, coming out July 3. My new book also has back jacket blurbs by booksellers rather than the usual authors and reviewers.

Signing Books. It's a myth that signed books can't be returned. They get returned all the time. But they're less likely to get returned, and they're more likely to sell. Plus, a signed book often gets prime bookstore real estate without costing coop dollars.

Speaking in Public. Every chance you have to pimp your books should be taken. The more you stay in the public eye, the more books you'll sell. Speak at all of the libraries, conferences, conventions, and book festivals you can.

The Media. I'm not a fan of advertising. But getting a review, or doing an interview (for zines, newspapers, websites, blogs, radio, etc) is a free and easy way to get your name out there.

Writing. The very best way to stay in the writing spotlight is to keep writing. A book a year is essential. Two books a year is better. And don't forget short stories and articles —these not only pay you, but give you a much wider exposure than your books alone.

The Internet. Be active on your website, blog, MySpace, newsletter, newsgroups, message boards, listservs, and email correspondence. The more people you can reach, the better off you are.

Will this guarantee you never go out of print? No. There are no guarantees. But the fact remains: the more you do, the more books you'll sell.

20 comments

Unreproduceable Phenomenon

I spoke at a writers club in Geneva while ago, and prior to it one of the organizers took me out for a bite. Over paninis, I tried to articulate my belief that no one in publishing knows what they're doing.

"Books," I said, "are like a science experiment without a control. If a book is successful, everyone is quick to take credit for it, and when a book fails, everyone scratches their heads, but no one can explain why either happens because publishers can do the exact same things for two different books and get two very different results."

My friend said, "I get it. Publishing a book is an unreproduceable phenomenon."

I liked that term so much I wrote it down.

Every book is released into the world under unique circumstances. Some of the things that factor into a book being published are:

- Type of book
- How it's written
- Who the author is
- Date of release
- Amount of advertising
- Amount of publicity
- Amount of marketing
- Publisher enthusiasm
- Bookseller enthusiasm
- Fan enthusiasm
- Library enthusiasm
- Cover art
- Print run
- Catalog placement
- Size of advance
- Foreign sales
- Movie sales
- Coop budget
- Distribution
- Similar releases
- Market saturation
- Price
- Word of mouth

There are many other factors as well.

Now common sense would say that many of these factors are within a publisher's control, so the more that they do, the better off the book will be. But there are so many factors that even a big book with huge expectations can, and often does, flop.

So the current publishing model is to do the bare minimum, and see if magic happens on its own. And magic happens often enough to keep everyone in the game, trying to figure out how to reproduce it.

But that's the problem. Publishing is an unreproduceable phenomenon.

I once compared publishers to those Skinner pigeons who pecked a lever that offered a treat at random intervals. The pigeons kept pecking, even though their efforts didn't yield any direct, controllable results.

If we add to this situation the poor business model of booksellers having no accountability for sales (because of the return system) then the amount of risk a publisher must take goes up, along with the amount of money needed to be spent to earn money.

Suddenly we see why a 50% sell through has become acceptable, and why authors who follow their publisher's advice to the letter —-or even do more than their publishers require —-often find themselves without another contract.

If it's true that no one really knows what they're doing, and that luck is ultimately responsible for a book's success, then it really shouldn't matter what the author does because fate will decide what happens. Just write the best book possible and cross your fingers, right?

Well, sometimes that works. Sometimes you buy a single lottery ticket and win. Sometimes you buy ten tickets a week for thirty years before you win. But most of the time you never win.

Which begs the question: what should authors be doing is no one really knows what to do?

The answer is easy. You have to do everything you can to become your own unreproduceable phenomenon.

You'll do some things that work, and other things that won't, and when success comes you'll hopefully be smart enough to know that it wasn't any specific thing you did that made you a hit, but more likely a combination of things plus luck.

Luck doesn't mean you can stop trying. Luck means you have to keep trying until luck happens.

24 comments

Treading Water

I get a lot of email.

This isn't a brag, or a complaint. But in any given week, I'll get between 50 and 100 emails about fiction writing.

Some are from fans who want to tell me they enjoy my books or stories.

Some are from writers who want to tell me they enjoy my blog or website.

Some are from peers who want to talk shop.

Some are from people who want a moment of my time to look at their story or query or speak to their writer's group or school or library or convention or conference or who want an interview or a blurb or to use a quote or an excerpt or to enter one of my contests.

I'm also getting a lot of thank yous for helping people, which I enjoy almost as much as the kind words from fans.

I began **A Newbie's Guide to Publishing** because I wanted a place to share what I've learned about this business. One of the cool side-benefits is that I've met a lot of people through this blog, and have learned a lot from them. It's become a place where people of all experience levels can come to dish the dirt, exchange ideas, and form mutual appreciation societies, which I'm all for.

I have always prided myself in being accessible. I want to be the author that returns emails, responds to appearance requests, gives freely of his time.

But I'm starting to slack.

I haven't really recovered from the Rusty Nail 500 this summer because I've remained pretty busy. Since returning from tour, I've visited an additional 65 bookstores, and have taken business trips to Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. I've also done ten events, and managed to write a screenplay, a treatment, the first 10k of a new novel, and a short story. Plus I blurbed two books.

As a result, email is suffering.

A lot of big authors don't have contact info on their websites, or you can only contact them through a form, or through their web designer.

I'm not a big author, so I can only imagine the huge numbers of emails they must be getting in order to force them to do this. I'm overwhelmed by 600 overdo emails in my inbox. I bet Stephen King gets that per day, or per hour.

Which got me to thinking. Does this career ever become less time-consuming?

I've been working pretty hard to become successful, hoping to reach a point where I can coast. But now I'm wondering if I'll ever reach that point. Will any of us?

Tess Gerritsen is in the middle of a huge tour. I spoke with Lee Child in NY a few months back, and he'd already been on 47 planes this year. Barry Eisler finished his own 330 bookstore tour and then immediately had to head east to research his new Rain book, due next month. I've seen David Morrell more times this year than I've seen my wife, because we keep going to the same events. The only one who doesn't seem to be doing any constant promotion is James Rollins, but he's excused because he writes two 120k books a year. Actually, I have seen Jim four times this year at events, so scratch that last comment.

Can we, as writers, ever reach a point where we can slow down? Does success ever come, or do we fear failure even when we become bestsellers? Does that fear force us to keep working 80 hour weeks?

I've only been a professional writer for about five years. It seems that I'm working just as hard as the day I signed my first contract. I don't think this is getting any easier.

But things have changed. I'm in much better place than I was five years ago. All of the work branding and building name-recognition, all of the intangible effects of constant self-promotion, seems to have helped my career.

I've reached a wonderful point where I don't have to fight as hard for media or events —often they come to me. The time I would have spent searching for publicity is now spent doing publicity, which is much more rewarding.

I've also reached a point where I get recognized occasionally. When I visit a bookstore, the booksellers and fans sometimes know who I am. This is sooooo cool, and always thrills me. In fact, it thrills me so much that I'm visiting even more bookstores. I'll hit 600 by the end of the year.

Which brings me to the point of this blog entry. When I first began in this business, answering email was a priority. I printed out my first hundred fan letters and kept them in a binder. I was amazed that people actually contacted me.

While I still enjoy getting email, these days it takes me three months to respond. It's important, but not near the top of my to-do list.

Five years from now, will I be one of those guys who simply can't respond to email? And if so, is this a good thing or a bad thing?

Can we, as authors, ever reach a point where we can relax a little bit? Or are we salmon who never get to spawn, no matter how far up the river we get?

35 comments

JA Konrath Saves Publishing

Good news! I was rummaging around in the attic today, and came across this old brass oil lamp. I gave it a good buffing, with the intent to sell it on eBay, but after only a few minutes a genie magically appeared. He gave me six wishes (normally genies only give three, but I gave him a *really* good buffing.)

Being the unselfish guy that I am, I have decided to use these six wishes to save the publishing industry. By happenstance, this also saves the bookselling industry, and manages to save midlist authors as well.

Here are my wishes:

1. Eliminate returns. Returns cost too much money, both in the printing and the shipping, and this cost is absorbed in the price of the product. If there were no longer returns, the prices of books would drop. It would also mean that stores don't stock double the amount of bestsellers that they expect to sell. This extra shelf space could then go to smaller midlist books that aren't normally stocked.

2. Eliminate offset printing. If the major publishers used POD technology, there would no longer be a need for warehouses or distributors. Another drop in price. Plus, books never go out of print. Authors have the potential for royalties indefinitely.

3. Bigger royalties for authors, to correspond with the smaller pricetag on books.

4. Extra content on books without extra cost. Books could come packaged with the audio version and Palmreader version bundled with the print version on a single DVD. It could also include interviews, pictures, perhaps even video.

5. Equal discounts. The indies pay the same amount as the big box stores, no matter how many are ordered. That will mean a drop in the sales at big box stores, but it would be a boom for the indies and the chains.

6. Bookselling is taught in college. How much would it benefit authors, bookstores, and people who love to read, if you could major in book sales? Book stores could hire people with specialized degrees, people who were extremely well-read and know the dynamics of the book business. I've met booksellers who have literally handsold thousands of books. What if every bookseller was like this?

The genie assured me that these wishes will come true, but he hemmed and hawed a bit about how long it was going to take.

I have faith, though. Lots of faith.

In the meantime, I'm searching my attic for another lamp, because the music industry is really a disaster.

34 comments

Future What Ifs

It's easy to fall behind when you're a writer.

I'm behind in my blog, behind in my email, behind in MySpace, behind in my website, and behind in my writing.

The strange thing is, I've been working my tail off.

I'm writing back-to-back novels. Finished the first. Almost finished the second. Then had to stop work on the second to do a semi-major rewrite on the first.

On one hand, I feel this is what I've always wanted to do: write for a living. For the past four years I've felt more like a marketer than a writer, because that's taken up the majority of my time.

But for the past three months, I've been feeling guilty because I haven't been putting in the marketing time.

I haven't been a complete slacker. But I haven't been able to find the harmonious balance between writing and promoting. It's been 95% writing.

I'm not sure that's a wise idea. Because the publishing world is changing.

I've been thinking a lot on this topic. Here are some of the things I've been noticing.

- More titles being published, but less of each title being sold
- The price of books rising while other media drops in price
- Indie bookstores struggling
- Books getting smaller promotional budgets
- Chain bookstores losing money, closing locations, reorganizing
- Bookstores stocking higher quantities of fewer titles
- The ineffectiveness of advertising to sell books
- Greater competition for fewer readers
- The majority of books being sold through non-bookstore outlets
- Movies, TV, Music, and the Internet taking readers

Now many of these things have been happening for decades. I don't think we're near the end of the print book anytime soon.

But I do think that the future is coming, and profits won't be tied into selling a lot of paper books as much as they've been in the past.

Authors have needed publishers for two things: printing and distribution. These things cost money. Printing, shipping, warehousing, advertising, and marketing isn't free. Neither is paying editors, sales reps, publicists, marketers, etc.

The Internet allows for free copies and distribution. Virtually all costs associated with a book are eliminated. Yet I don't see many publishers, or authors, taking advantage of this, a market where 1 billion people log on daily. In fact, many people are fighting it.

I've had several thousand downloads of my free ebooks, ORIGIN and THE LIST, and several hundred positive comments on them from readers.

I released these books as an experiment, to spread word-of-mouth and encourage free readers to also try my print books.

But maybe I missed the bigger picture.

In this age, information wants to be free. You can search the net and find free songs, movies, shows, and books. This terrifies the music companies, the movie companies, the publishing companies, because people are getting for free what they paid for in the past.

But haven't things always been free?

Since the 1950's, people have gotten TV for free. They've just paid for the device to watch it on.

Prior to that, there was radio.

If the users doesn't pay for these shows, who does?

Consider Google. A billion dollar company. They're a search engine, using software to compile information about websites they didn't create. Where do they get their money?

Writers have long thought that publishers are the only way to make money in this business. But there is another way, that really hasn't been pursued.

What if, in ORIGIN, my characters drank Coke? What if, in THE LIST, my hero drove a sporty new Mazda RX7? What if, at the end of each book, there was a nice full color ad for Alberto VO5? And what if each of these companies gave me a few thousand bucks to do this? What if they also distributed the books for me, reaching more readers than I ever could?

Advertisers pay for TV and radio. Advertisers help pay for movie production with product placement. Advertisers make Google worth a billion dollars.

What if advertisers paid authors for product placement in their books? On author websites?

Or go a step further. What if advertisers hosted websites where people could download text and audiobooks for free?

Instead of making money off of sales, authors would get paid by advertisers.

Now before everyone starts screaming about the purity of the novel, and how it is an expression of the author, not a 300 page commercial, consider that film and TV and newspapers and magazines have been putting out a lot of quality product for many years, being funded by advertising dollars.

Publishers could capitalize on this. What if paperbacks had ads in the back? Would it bother you, as a reader?

Would it bother you less if these paperbacks with advertising only cost $3.99 as opposed to $8.99? Or if you could get a new hardcover Stephen King novel for $10, but all of Steve's characters drank Miller Lite, and on the last page there was a coupon for Handi-Wipes?

What if publishers hosted the websites, paid authors a salary to generate content (novels) and gave the books away for free, generating their income through banner ads and sponsors?

What if there was a subscription based service, like an Ebook of the Month Club?

What if a really great ebook reader gets created, something that is even better to read than paper? Don't laugh —-Sony thought CDs would always rule the music biz, until that pesky iPod came around. CD sales have dropped. People are trading music for free. This will happen in the publishing industry as well. Could authors still make money?

There will always be a need for storytellers. But the way storytellers get paid may change

An author's success is based on positive reactions to name recognition. In 2007, that means the author can sell a lot of paper. In 2027, that might mean that author has his face on a box of cereal, with a free book inside.

Peer-to-peer file sharing is done by millions of people. On sites like Kazaa, e-donkey, Limewire, bit torrent, mIRC, and FTP warehouses, people are trading their media.

Think about that. This isn't a distribution network set up by the media, or the advertisers. It's set up *by fans.* And it's growing.

Yet instead of media companies exploiting this, they try to shut it down. The scream about copyright infringement, and intellectual property.

Shouldn't they be using this somehow?

Shouldn't we?

32 comments

My Speech at Google

I just returned from the **Unbound** conference in New York. Google flew me in first class, set me up at a nice hotel, and plied me with liquor, all so I could deliver eight minutes of my thoughts on the internet and the future of publishing to more than five hundred publishers.

I didn't pull punches.

Other speakers included **Tim O'Reilly**, who was smart, **Cory Doctorow**, who was great, and **Seth Godin**, who was both smart and great. Another big name was also there, but I missed his speech. It may have had to do with a chat we had backstage, where I revealed that I visited 612 bookstores last summer and he replied, "Apparently you place a zero value on your time." I smiled and explained that my time spent touring was an investment in my future career, and that I was a recruiting a nation wide sales force.

"Talk to booksellers?" he replied. "I never considered that."

Some people don't get it. Or they don't want to get it, because it implies they might be doing less. No biggie. I wish him much success.

The speakers on my panel were the delightful **Josh Kilmer-Purcell**, and the surprisingly down-to-earth **Stephen J. Dubner**, who —even though he's got to be a gazillionaire from **Freakonomics** —still signs 5000 bookplates for fans *every month.* He is now my new hero.

Here's what I said to the publishing world, fleshed out a little bit (I had to make some cuts for time) and minus the jokes (which involved the NY subway, Powerpoint pie graphs, and Hollywood —-trust me, you aren't missing anything.)

— —-

—JA's Speech to the Publishing World —

I write about a police officer named Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels. The books are a cross between the scares of Patterson and the laughs of Evanovich. But most of my professional time isn't spend writing, it's spent trying to spread the word about what I write to potential readers.

Publishers try to do this by advertising. Two generally accepted ways to approach advertising are top down and bottom up.

Top down advertising includes billboards, print ads, TV commercials, and internet banner ads. It's casting a wide net, hoping that a potential customer will see the ad and seek out the product. It works, but isn't cost-effective;the amount of time and money spent doesn't justify the few sales the ads generate.

Plus, no one enjoys being sold. And people natural distrust ads. Readers already have a pretty good idea of what they like and don't like. And they seek out what they like, and are constantly looking for information about things that might fit their tastes.

Bottom up advertising uses a different approach. Instead of treating customers like a huge group and hoping the ad reaches some specific people, it targets specific people.

Advertisers crow about the importance of name recognition, but how many authors do you know by name? Does that mean you buy their books? I can name a few hundred, but only buy a few dozen of them.

That's because name recognition doesn't mean anything, unless it has a positive experience attached to it.

Last summer, for my book **Rusty Nail**, I visited 612 bookstores. I met over 1400 booksellers, gave them free books, and signed coasters, and told them about my series. I also thanked them —every one of them —in the acknowledgments of my fourth book, **Dirty Martini**, coming out this summer.

Basically, I recruited a sales force by trying to turn the people selling my books into fans, or at least make them knowledgeable about my brand, which is significant considering there are 150k titles in an average bookstore.

That's bottom up; targeting individuals, providing them with entertainment and information so they can decide if my books are right for them, or in this case, their customers. So when someone comes into a bookstore looking for a specific type of book, these booksellers can pass along the information and make recommendations. I gave them more than a free signed book. I gave them a positive experience. And that, plus name recognition, equals branding.

How can this be applied to the world wide web?

The Internet, like those booksellers, can make recommendations. It can inform, and entertain, and be a positive experience that reinforces a brand. .

I've used the net to target my audience. When you're targeting potential customers, it isn't about what you have to sell. It's about what you have to offer. And if you have a smart web presence, you don't even have to target individuals —-they'll find you.

I recently got on MySpace, and realized it is a publisher's wet dream. People with MySpace pages list the things that they like, to tell others about themselves. Many people list books. Think about this —books are so important to these people that they use author names and titles to define who they are. It's very easy to find fans of Evanovich, Patterson, and Coben. And it's very easy to invite fans of those authors to be MySpace friends, if you write similar books.

I have a blog called **A Newbie's Guide to Publishing**. It's based on the principal that it isn't what you have to sell, it's what you have to offer. I offer content, in the form of information and opinion about the publishing industry. I've had over two hundred blog posts, and each one of them becomes a permanent road on the net that leads to me. I get Google hits on posts I made 2 years ago, and the threads don't die —people keep adding comments.

My website isn't set up to be an ad for my books. It's set up to be entertaining, and informative. You can download free novels, short stories, and book and audio excerpts, along with an ebook about how to find an agent. I have over a hundred pages of content for fans and newbie authors looking for advice, and even though I don't update as often as I should, I still get close to 1000 unique visitors a day.

On my website, I make it easy for people to stay in touch. I have a newsletter that more than 10,000 people have signed up for, and one click Paypal buying so people who can't find autographed copies of my books can get them from me directly, inscribed and with free shipping.

While publishers worry about finding readers, and go about it as effecsledgehammering a sledgehamemr to kill a gnat, readers are actively looking for books to read. But they need more than slick ads to persuade them. They need a positive experience to link with a name. That's 99% of what I'm trying to do —provide a positive experience, for the people looking for me, and the people discovering me by surfing.

The bigger web presence you have, the more people will discover you.

How does this apply to the future of publishing?

An entire generation is learning how to read by using computers. More and more people are getting their information and entertainment on the web. And they arenÂ't being passive about it —they're seeking it out.

On the subway today, I counted 7 people with PDAs, Blackberrys, and Palms, and two more with mp3 players. People need their media so much they're taking it with them when they leave their desks. Only three people on that train were reading newspapers. What does that say about the future of print media?

People read online all the time. It's up to the publishers to teach them how to read books online.

There's no reason why books can't be packaged with a CD. It could contain various downloadable text AND audio formats, so people can read it on their PDA or listen to it on their mp3 player. It can include pictures, video interviews, deleted chapters and extra short stories. It could be popped into a computer and take the reader to a webpage where they can chat with other fans, and the author, and leave messages and comments and questions.

And publishers should also approach it from the other end. Each book could have a dedicated website, just like movies. And it could offer the same things; downloads, previews, screen savers, and forums for fans to meet. It should also provide links to buying the book, both as a download, and as a print copy.

Why stop there? Take a cue from the DVD and music industries, that package whole season sets of shows and full discographies of bands. Do you want people to embrace ebooks? (You should —no shipping, no returns, no printing, no distributor, no waste, higher profit margin.) Then package 20 Stephen King books on a Sandisk card for $40. Steve gets the 60 cent per book royalty he would have gotten from a paperback sale, and the buyer changes his reading habits.

We switched from LPs to CDs, and VHS to DVD. We can convert some people from print to online leisure reading —-especially since everyone reads online anyway.

You can spend a fortune hunting mice. You can mount expeditions, buy expensive mouse hunting equipment, tour the world, and devote all of your time to tracking those little suckers down.

Or you can toss some cheese in the corner and wait.

The choice yours.

26 comments

Risky Business

Let's talk about risk.

According to the dictionary, risk is the quantifiable likelihood of loss or less than expected returns.

Many activities have some sort of risk associated with them. Travel. Sex. Sports. Even eating, though the risk may be long-term.

If you look up stats on car accidents, or heart attacks, you might wonder why we still speed or eat french fries, because the risk is great.

The answer is that we weigh the benefits of these activities against the risk, and judge them worth doing anyway. So we dive 100mph while eating a gordito, because the odds are in our favor that we won't have a burnout and then v-fib.

Gambling may be the most calculated, and the most honest, risk we expose ourselves to. The rewards and risks, and the odds for both, are all laid out for us.

But our careers, on the other hand, are places where we tend to minimize risk as much as possible. We feel fortunate to be employed, and much of what we do is geared toward making sure we stay employed. Since our families are often tied in with our jobs, we can put up with a lot of crap at work in order to make sure the people we love have enough money, food, clothing, shelter, and XBOX 360 games in order to be happy.

When your job is one that involves a great deal of luck (you knew I'd get to publishing, right?) and you've worked very hard to be published, the last thing you want to do is rock the boat and lose your place in line.

Writers are conditioned to be grateful. We should be grateful —-more people make their livings playing major league baseball than writing fiction. But that doesn't mean we should devalue ourselves.

I've always been about making money for my publisher. I feel a writing contract is a partnership, and if one partner is making money, so is the other.

But what if your partner isn't doing all they can, or should, be doing? You're doing your best. Writing good books. Promoting like crazy. Making money. But rather than try to grow, your partner is content with how things are. And your partner assumes that you're content as well, because you're damn lucky to be published in the first place.

I feel this situation is a problem. Perhaps not for all writers. Some may be happy with where they're at, and content to ride the status quo. Other writers, however, feel frustrated and trapped, because leaving their publisher and/or agent to try and go elsewhere involves a great deal of risk.

Is a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush if the bird is crapping all over your wrist?

One of my many core beliefs is that we should die regretting the things we haven't done, not the things we've done. Making a mistake is better than doing nothing at all.

Yes, walking away from an agent or publisher is hard. After all, they believed in you. Gave you a chance. Made you some money. You like them, and they like you. And if you leave them, you may wind up worse off.

But writing is a business, and the most successful business people take risks. That's just the way it goes. You have to be willing to lose big in order to win big.

How do you know it's time to part ways with your business partners? Here are a few signs.

You aren't getting feedback. If your agent/editor doesn't reply to your concerns in a timely, efficient manner, you aren't high on their priority list. Why should they be high on yours?

You're being handled. If you're treated like child, patronized, condescended to, then this isn't a good relationship. Ditto if you're shuffled off to underlings.

You have different plans for your future. This is a big one. If you want to go somewhere, and they want you to go somewhere else, how hard are they going to work to get you where you want to be? Even if you both want to get to the same place, do you agree on how to get there?

You aren't growing. Look inward. Are you doing all you can to grow? Are the people who are supposed to help you to grow actually helping you, or hindering you?

You want more money. Face it, we all want more money. But you can't ask for it politely. You have to demand it, and go elsewhere if you don't get it. But you will never win a negotiation if you aren't willing to walk away. Is your agent willing to play hardball, even if she loses? Is your publisher so committed to your success that they're willing to make a substantial investment in your future?

You aren't happy. This is ultimately the only thing that counts. Playing he said/she said doesn't do anyone any good. You need to take a close look at your professional relationships, weigh the good against the bad, and decide if you want to stick around.

But that's the thing. It's YOUR decision. It's YOUR career. Yes, other people are helping you make money, but you're helping them as well. Your books, both past and future, are a commodity.

Commodities are traded, bought, and sold, all the time. They change hands. Many hands.

Look closely at your career. Is it time for you to change hands too?

31 comments

Writing: The Temporary Career

I'm not going to name names in this post. Partly because it would be mean. Partly because I'm only speculating on the reasons why, and have no real proof.

But I still wanted to talk about something that's rampant in the word of publishing. It's also rampant in other media like radio, TV, movies, and music.

It's Where Are They Now Syndrome.

The scariest thing about WATNS is how quickly it seems to occur. When my first novel, Whiskey Sour, was published in 2004, I did as much self-promotion as I could. Going to writing conventions, signing at bookstores and libraries, I met dozens of writers who also had new books out. Some were debut authors, like me. Some were veterans who seemed like they'd be around forever.

But here it is, a scant four and a half years later, and I can name more than thirty of these authors who didn't publish anything in the past year, and in some cases the past two years.

This boggles my mind.

While everyone is aware of the transitory nature of fame (it's particularly noticeable in Hollywood where A list actors fade into B list actors, and B list actors sometimes have a huge hit that makes them A list) I actually never thought it applied to writers as well.

Well, it does. With one major difference. When you're considered a B list author, you can't even give your work away. There's no straight-to-DVD or movie-of-the-week option like there is for actors who used to be Somebody. There are some smaller presses, yes. And while a lot of them are terrific, their lack of major distribution dollars means even smaller numbers for writers who once were published by the major houses, which means the major houses will be even less likely to give these writers another shot.

In thinking about this phenomenon, I was tempted to rationalize why so-and-so hasn't had a book deal in a while. Yes, numbers follow authors. But maybe there are other reasons too.

Perhaps some authors decided they just didn't want to write anymore. Perhaps some veered off into different territory and couldn't find a home for it. Perhaps some wanted to write, but were out of ideas. Perhaps there were extenuating circumstances like sickness, or some personal or family tragedy. Perhaps some simply take a very long time to write a book. Perhaps work or some other aspect of real life got in the way.

Perhaps.

And yet, knowing what a struggle it is to find an agent and get published, it seems odd that so many writers —writers I did signings with only four years ago —would let anything prevent them from writing. This profession requires dedication and sticktoitivness, and the lessons learned early on in the career when rejections are plentiful tend to make a person battle-hardened. Writers, as a species, don't tend to give up easily.

Which makes WATNS all the more troubling.

There are writers who had the brass ring, and want to have it again, but for whatever reason can't seem to grasp it.

Battle-hardened does not equal bullet-proof.

It's tempting to blame the industry, which is flawed for many reasons. A book's success is often a self-fulfilling prophecy; big promotional dollars leads to more orders leads to more sales. Do bestsellers really sell so well because of name recognition, or because when you're at an airport or drugstore and want to buy a book you only have the choice of a dozen titles? If a lessor name writer was given wider distribution, naturally they would sell more books. Yet few are given this push.

But I also personally know a few authors who did get that big push. In some cases, six and seven figure advances and corresponding marketing dollars. And here it is, a few years later, and those books are already out of print.

It's tempting to blame the writer, for producing lackluster work, or failing to self-promote, or being difficult to work with. And yet I've read many out-of-print novels that I believe are just as good or even better than books in their thirtieth printing by name authors who do very little self-promotion. I also know a few successful authors who are real jerks, and that hasn't seemed to hurt their careers.

There's a mentality that once you land a deal with a major house, you're set. But the fact is (and get ready for the kick in the groin) the majority of people who get a major deal wind up as WATHS statistics.

I can look at my extensive personal library, and 90% of those books are out of print, and 60% of those authors haven't published anything in years.

Landing a major deal, in most cases, doesn't signal the start of a longtime career. For many, it's the beginning of the end.

I can guess what many regular readers of my blog are thinking. Okay Joe, now that you've presented the problem, tell us what we can do to fix it like you always do.

Well, frightening as it is, this is one problem I can't fix.

I'd love to be able to point a finger and conclusively say, "This is why she's still being published, and this is why he isn't." But I can't. There are no traits or commonalities that can accurately predict success or failure.

After a certain level of competency is reached, who gets published and who doesn't is pretty much based on luck. This is true for newbies, and remains true for writers who have been in the biz for years.

All we can do is persevere, and keep writing and self-promoting and doing our damnedest to survive. Because, depressingly enough, this career is more about survival than success.

But, as I've been saying for years, the harder you try, the luckier you seem to get.

So if anyone with WATNS is reading this, remember that giving up isn't an option. Yes, you've gotten some bad breaks. Yes, this business is woefully unfair. Yes, it doesn't make any sense at all. But the same dedication that got you published that first time must be used to get you published again.

I know we all believe that once you "make it" there is no longer any struggle, the fears go away, and the opportunities are boundless.

But the truth is the struggle never ends, the fears are always there, and every opportunity that comes along should be appreciated as the gift it actually is.

So the rules, for newbie and pro alike, are the same.

1. Write the best book you can.

2. Try your best to get it into the hands of as many people as possible.

3. Repeat.

That's all we can do. Beyond that, it's all luck.

Just don't forget rule 3. The longer I'm in this business, the more I think it's the one that separates the haves from the have nots.

Now quit your whining and get to work.

43 comments

The Audiobook Revolution

J.A. Konrath is the author of the Lt. Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels series. His sixth book, *Cherry Bomb*, will be released July 7. He also wrote the horror novel *Afraid*, under the pen name Jack Kilborn. All seven of these books are available on Brilliance Audio.

Let's talk about audiobooks.

I love them, for many, many reasons.

Maybe it goes back to some of my happiest childhood memories, being read to by my parents.

Maybe it's because a good audiobook performer makes a novel come alive in a way that I can't when I'm reading print.

Maybe it's because, as my life becomes increasingly busier, I don't have as much time to read as I'd like to, so audiobooks are a perfect way to enjoy literature while I'm driving, exercising, shopping, doing housework (I'm a stay at home dad), and swimming.

Yeah, I said swimming. I'm one of those geeks who has a waterproof cover for my iPod, so I listen to books at the beach and the pool, often while in the water.

While all of these are good reasons to love audiobooks, I think the biggest one of all is how user-friendly they've become.

Years ago, cassette tapes (remember those?) were the audiobook standard. An unabridged book could take up ten or more tapes, and these were fussy to carry around and keep organized. I was constantly losing my place, putting in the wrong tape or the wrong side, rewinding and fast forwarding.

Then came CDs. An improvement, for sure. With many chapter stops, it was much easier to find where I'd left off. But I still had to juggle ten, sometimes even twenty disks. And the cost was a little prohibitive. I love Dean Koontz, but fifty bucks for a book really put a dent in my entertainment budget.

But that was then, this is now. Audiobookphiles like me are rejoicing in this new age of mp3s and downloads.

You can get all of my audiobooks on mp3—unabridged—for the same cost as a hardcover. Sometimes even cheaper. On Amazon.com, my audiobook mp3s currently range in price from fifteen to twenty-four bucks, and even less if you want to go with the abridged edition. They're also available wherever audiobooks are sold, as well as on www.AudiobookStand.com.

Best of all, my audio mp3s come on a single CD.

How cool is that? No more lugging around multiple disks. The whole book fits nicely on one CD. It has over a hundred chapter stops so you can easily find your place, and pretty much all home and car stereo equipment made since 2003 can play mp3s.

Is one disk still too many?

Then there's the download option. You can go to Audible.com, or iTunes, and download the audiobook on mp3 for a comparable price. Besides the venerable iPod, mp3s can be played on every computer, and hundreds of different kinds of portable players, including most cell phones (yes, your cell phone can play audiobooks), PDAs, and handheld gaming machines like the Sony PSP. Most cars can now play mp3s without the need for the CD—you can simply plug directly into the system.

You also have the option of using the other popular download format, WMA files, for your Zune, computer, and many other devices that play Windows Media Audio. Visit www.Audiobookstanddl.com for more info.

It's a wonderful time to be an audiobook fan. Never before have audiobooks been so plentiful, so easy to use, and so inexpensive.

Since you're here on the Brilliance Audio website, I'm probably already preaching to the converted. But while I have your attention, let me do just a bit of blatant self promotion.

My audiobooks are awesome.

I'm not talking about the actual writing. I mean, I personally think the writing is pretty good, and fans seem to dig it, but I'm admittedly biased.

What I'm referring to is how my audiobooks are produced. The Jack Daniels books are all read by two people—Dick Hill and Suzie Breck. Both are Audie winners (the Oscar equivalent for audiobooks) and they each play different characters on my books, doing multiple voices, making them sound like theater productions done with ensemble casts.

Sometimes I even get to sneak onto the recording set and play a character. I've also been able to add little extras to some of my audiobooks—interviews, short stories read by me, comedy skits—that appear at the end of the narrative as a little bonus.

So a very good case can be made that audiobooks are the way to go if you want to enjoy J.A. Konrath or Jack Kilborn.

A word about Kilborn. While my Jack Daniels novels have some scary parts in them, those scares are balanced with a lot of humor.

Afraid, by Jack Kilborn, has no humor. It's a scare machine, read macabrely by Phil Gigante.

Because of this, I have to state that I can't be held liable for any heart attacks, nightmares, or therapy you'll need after listening to *Afraid*.

If you do feel you're brave enough to listen to *Afraid*, please do not do so while you're alone, or at night, or with the lights out, or while operating heavy machinery. You have been warned.

Now if you'll excuse me, I've been writing all day, so I'm going to hop into the shower. I think I'll take Dean Koontz with me.

I hope Dean doesn't mind...

You, Artist

I've been buried in deadlines, but several people pointed me to the current Harlequin controversy. Jackie Kessler sums it up nicely. So does John Scalzi. And Stacey Cochran has a different take on things.

In a nutshell, Harlequin is starting a vanity imprint, where authors can pay to have their books printed.

My feelings are mixed.

On one hand, Harlequin is a smart company, good at making money, and this seems to be a smart way to capitalize on a growing trend.

On the other hand, it could hurt their brand, and their many authors who get paid for (rather than pay for) their books.

The debate doesn't interest me much, though I do give Harlequin props for their forward-thinking, even if their implementation leaves something to be desired. After all, they're the first major publisher to recognize how much the average person yearns to create.

As a species, we're a productive bunch. I take daily walks, and force myself not to take my surroundings for granted. When you look around your world and realize how much is man-made, it's rather humbling. We build. We manufacture. We plant. We bend the landscape to suit our needs. And we create. A lot.

It's probably genetic. Our self-worth is very much wrapped up in things we're able to produce. Art is one of those things. And while it's less practical than a Chevy, or a Quarter Pounder with Cheese, it is more accessible.

YouTube is one of the most significant, and interesting, products of the modern world. Since the beginning of film and video, those with deep pockets decided what the masses would see.

But with the advent of cheap technology, and the inborn desire to create, regular people without deep pockets have been able to share their art (movies, rants, music, commentary, critiques, how-tos, etc) with the world.

At first glance, this could have been a self-indulgent disaster. And there certainly is a lot of crap on YouTube.

But there's also some really cool stuff. Stuff even cooler than the stuff being produced by the people with deep pockets.

The most amazing thing about YouTube isn't the ability to share your videos. The most amazing thing is that people are TUNING IN to watch these videos.

A whole lot of people.

If you go to Alexa.com and look at the top websites on the Internet, you'll notice many of them share a common denominator called user aggregated content.

In other words, regular people contribute to these websites, which makes them big.

If you look at Google, it is actually 100% user aggregated content. Wikipedia, Yahoo, Amazon, file-sharing lockers and sites, Flickr, Twitter, Facebook —-the list goes on and on.

People dictate what people want to visit, and want to see.

Which brings us to reading.

The same genetic need that drives human being to write Amazon reviews, join Yahoo groups, share photos, upload videos, Tweet, and otherwise contribute to the overall output of humanity, also drives people to write books.

Amazon, and Smashwords, are catering to these writers by allowing them to upload their ebooks, for free. They understand the importance of ***user aggregated content***.

My advice to Harlequin, and to all publishers, is to follow in the footsteps of Smashwords. But in a way that strengthens, rather than diminishes, their brand.

Here's what I'd do if I was in charge of Harlequin.

1. Create a community forum, where newbie authors can upload ebooks for free. These ebooks can also be downloaded for free.

2. Allow these free ebooks to be printed on demand for those who want to by them. Make a small profit on the printing, but keep the price reasonable, and the authors own the rights. This is a printing service, not a publishing service.

3. Let the community vet itself. Allow for discussions, reviews, ratings, author chats, and comments. Crap will be avoided. Cream will rise.

4. Hire editors to mine the ebooks, looking for gems. Then cherry pick those and traditionally publish the best of them.

To draw extra attention to the website, the publisher should also release their backlist as ebooks. But rather than give these away for free, they should be sold in a variety of ebook formats, for a low cost (say $1.99.)

So picture this:

You go to Harlequin's ebook website, which has thousands of inexpensive ebooks. It also has free ebooks, uploaded by newbie authors.

You can join the forums and discussions and rate and review ebooks. You can also order print-on-demand copies of any ebook there, newbie or backlist.

Editors can monitor the downloads and the comments, to discover new authors they can traditionally publish.

Harlequin exploits their extensive backlist, makes a lot of money (that they don't have to share with Amazon), and discovers talent by letting the users aggregate the content and vote on the best. They don't get into trouble by becoming a vanity press, and they also secure their spot in the upcoming digital revolution. At the same time, they become an ebook version of YouTube, drawing both writers and readers.

It all comes down to this: People want to write. In the past, unscrupulous folks have preyed on this desire, making big promises and charging big fees.

Publishers can capitalize on this basic human desire, make some money, and still be the good guys. You don't have to be a vanity press to nurture dreams.

Writers will eventually get their YouTube. It's just a question of who will create it first.

14 comments

Promotion

Do Something

Many writers, both newbies and pros, engage in some sort of self-promotion.

The reason for this seems obvious: the more you do, the more books you'll potentially sell.

But the vast majority of those who self-promote are doing so with ignorance. They feel they must do *something* to help their careers, so they look around at what other authors are doing and adopt their methods.

The word *lemmings* comes to mind.

While I am a stalwart proponant of bettering your career through self-promotion, I've noticed that the difficulty —and resulting dissapointment —most writers are encountering has less to to with their hard work than their apparent lack of goals.

I can say, "Go self-promote," but that doesn't mean anything unless a writer has specific goals in mind, and a plan to attain those goals.

In other words, writers who feel compelled to do something will go out and do something, but their *something* does nothing for their career.

You must start with a plan. And the plan must be carefully thought-out, with goals more specific than "sell some books."

Let's look at a few standard writer self-promotion strategies, and why they suck. Then let's see if we can make them not suck so bad.

- **Doing a Booksigning.** Bestselling authors and booklaunch parties aside, why do writers believe they'll actually get a crowd at a signing? Have you ever been to a booksigning by an unknown author? If so, how many people were there with you? What brought you there —-publicity, or random chance?

  While on my tour, I ran into six other signings. One was a multiple author event, with seven authors at tables near the front of a large chain store.

  None of these signings attracted even the smallest of crowds, and in each case I handsold more books in each of these stores than the author did, and I was only there for 15 minutes.

- **Revised Goal.** Assume every booksigning you attend will be dead. What should you do? The secret to a successful signing isn't a bowl of candy, or a big poster, or a lot of publicty. The secret is getting up out of the chair and shaking the hand of everyone who walks into the store. If you can't do that, don't do booksignings until you're an NYT bestseller and will draw a crowd. Save your time.

  If the thought of meeting strangers terrifies you, use something to break the ice. I give out signed drink coasters. **Bob Morris** fries up conch fritters and mixes rum drinks (this costs some bucks, but he

always sells well.) **Brian Pinkerton** stays a minimum of four hours, often longer, and passes out bookmarks made from laminated strips of his handwritten first drafts. The writer needs something to say other than "Buy my book." What is it you're going to say?

- **Touring.** Book tours cost mega dollars, and recoup very little. Yet writers are conditioned to believe that they need to tour. Let's break a tour down, cost-wise. Eight cities, eight scheduled events.

  Let's go cheap, and figure each plane ticket is $150. Times nine (which is the trip back home) is $1350. A rental car at each location is $40, coop for each bookstore is $50, and a food stipend is $30 per day. Hotels can range from $50 to $150, depending on the city, so let's average it to $100. So the minimum cost of this tour is $3110.

  A publisher profits about what you do per book, about $3 a hardcover, sixty cents a paperback.

  In order to justify the cost of the tour, you'd have to sell 1036 hardcovers, or 129 in each location.

  If you sell thirty at a location, you're doing very well. Consistently selling over a hundred hardcovers is almost unheard of.

  Now there are some intangible benefits to touring, just as media exposure and publicity, meeting some booksellers and some fans, and signing stock. But I still find it hard to justify the cost vs. benefit.

- **Revised Goal.** Decide what the point of touring is. Getting publicity is always good, but there are a lot of hurdles a reader must overcome to go from hearing you on the radio to visiting you at a signing. Meeting fans is great, but meeting people who have never heard of you may be even more effective. And if those people are booksellers, you've recruited a sales force. Selling books is important, but chances are you won't sell many, and certainly not enough to justify the cost of the tour. Signing stock may help your sell-trhough, but if the stock is more than 20 copies you're probably going to get returns.

  My goals for my last tour were specific. I wanted to meet as many booksellers as I could and explain my series to them. I wanted to sign stock and encourage them to keep me stocked. And I wanted to impress my publisher.

  The cost of me visiting each store was $5.91, compared to $388.75 per store for a tradional tour. In some cases, I recouped the cost immediately, by selling a few books, or getting a free cappucino. A few hundred of the stores ordered more copies of my books after having met me. I met 950 booksellers (compared to perhaps 40 on a traditional tour) who now know me and my books.

  The immediate effects of my tour were free coop placement in high traffic areas, 4000+ signed books which will have a better sell-through than unsigned books, and future word-of-mouth sales from the booksellers, including several who will go on to sell hundreds of my titles.

The long-term benefits can include broader name recognition, future speaking opportunities, a buzz in the writing community, a lot of word-of-mouth among fans and peers, and hopefully a bigger promotional budget for my next book.

- **Mass Mailings.** Authors get ahold of mailing lists, either through a writer's organization, buying the list, or compiling it themselves. Then, when a book comes out, they send out a newsletter or postcard. Mailings are notoriously poor ways to sell books, and I've heard statistics that they only have between a 2% to 12% success rate. Crunch those numbers. With stamps at 39 cents, and the cost of printing postcards or newsletters, you can be spending 70 cents to hopefully sell a paperback that will give you 60 cents in royalties. And this will only happen, at best, 12% of the time.

  Have you ever bought a book because you received a mailing? I haven't. The slickest of them (I'm on Evanovich's mailing list) are mini magazines, offerening articles, reports, tour dates, and info about current and upcoming books. The Janet can afford to send this out. Chances are, you can't. Nor will yours be as effective, because The Janet has name recognition, 30 books in print, and keeps the costs down my mailing 300,000.

- **Revised Goal.** If you're going to target someone with a mass mailing, target what **Julia Spencer-Fleming** calls the ***force multimpliers.*** These are librarians and booksellers. In fact, while on tour, I was at an indie store in Florida when the mail came, and watched the bookseller open up one of Julia's mailings, which reminded the booksellers that Julia's new book was coming out. This is a much more effective use of your mailing dollar.

  Like The Janet, Julia had more in her mailing than just a jacket photo and some blurbs. She had an interview with another author, some reviews, and a detailed description of her backlist. Plus, sharing costs with another author made the mailing twice as effective, but half as expensive.

- **Build an Internet Presence.** You've heard it many times. All writers need a website. All writers need a blog. All writers need to belong to mesaage boards and listserv and newsgroups. All writers need a MySpace account.

  Well... why? What is the reason you have any of those things? If it's to sell books, you're mistaken. A very small percentage of books are sold on the Internet (I've heard that all Internet sales combined account for less than 10% of books sold.)

  These days, everyone is on the net. Everyone has some cyber real estate. But this doesn't directly lead to book sales. It probably won't even lead to return visits, unless you have something that keeps people coming back.

- **Revised Goal.** Target a demographic. The fact is, most writing blogs are read by the same 400 people in the publishing industry, and most author websites are simply 24 hour brochures for their books. Neither will help increase your fanbase.

MJ Rose, who knows a bit about self-promotion, understands this. She realizes that an Internet presence is a way to build name recognition and brand awareness, along with buzz. She also realizes that shouting "Buy My Book" has no effect at all on sales. So MJ's focus online is to offer information and expertise. People continually revist her blogs to learn things, and each day new people find her via search engines, links, and word of mouth. When she does a promotion, as with her current book **The Venus Fix**, it becomes an event, complete with contests, give-aways, charity donations, and the cutting edge of Internet technology. MJ isn't targeting the writing community with her **Vidlit book trailer** —-she's targeting everyday people who aren't involved in publishing.

Being online isn't enough. You have to have a reason for being online, and give people a reason to visit you. It's about what you have to offer, not what you have to sell.

- **Giveaways.** Bookmarks. Postcards. Business cards. Flyers. Pens. Food items featuring your name. T-shirts featuring your book cover. How many of these things have you gotten? How many have you kept? How many have made you buy the book they're promoting?

  At a booksigning, it's good to have something to give to browsers that they can look at while shopping. It's also smart to have something for the goodie table when you attend conferences. But if it costs more than a few cents, you're losing money on the transaction.

  The fact is, no freebie in the world can make someone buy a book.

- **Revised Goal.** Make sure your freebies are cheap, and offer enough information to pique the interest of someone who likes your kind of book. Flyers are the best. I also like chapbooks, as nothing can sell a book like a sample of the writing.

  I give away signed coasters, which are gimmicky but cheap. They feature my covers, and my URL. Signing them means they're less likely to be thrown away, and a coaster actually has a practical application. Do they sell books? No. Do they get people curious about my books? Perhaps.

  Tim Dorsey takes it to the next level. Rather than give things away, he sells them. And does well at it, too. When people are paying you to advertise your books, you've hit upon a genius idea.

- **Conferences.** No matter your genre, there are many conferences each year. Many authors get uptight about what panels they'll be on, or when their scheduled signing time is. The fact is, even if you're a huge bestseller, a conference will never pay for itself in the number of books you sell. The networking and fan-meeting is good for your career, and you can learn a lot in a short amount of time.

  Conferences can teach you how to speak in public, help you understand the business, and assist in building name recognition. But after a dozen or so conventions, the benefits are questionable. You're seeing the same group over and over, you're no longer actively learning anything, and they become an expensive way to drink with your friends rather than a powerful tool for building your career.

- **Revised Goal.** If you're a new writer, or an unpublished writer, attend as many conferences as you can afford. But after you've been doing it for a while, start to get choosey. Pick conferences you've never been to before, rather than the same one year after year. Perhaps only go to conferences that pay your way. Consider trade shows, and chain store manager meetings, and industry conventions as alternatives.

  When you do attend conferences, concentrate on meeting new people, not hanging out with those you already know. And remember to schmooze the booksellers.

- **Hire a Publicist.** Many writers believe that the first thing they should do after they sign a book deal is hire a publicist. They think that getting on the radio and TV and setting up signings will sell books.

  And it might, but probably not enough to cover the cost of the publicist you hired.

  A publicist, as the name implies, gets you publicity. Publicity, like advertising, doesn't necessarily sell books. It informs people that you and your books exist, which is helpful. But it doesn't herd them into the nearest bookstore and place a copy of your book in their hands. You could spend an awful lot of money on a publicist, and have very little to show for it.

- **Revised Goal.** If you hire a publicist, decide *exactly* what you want her to do, and try to only pay for results rather than attempts. I'm considering hiring a publicist for DIRTY MARTINI, because my previous novels haven't gotten a lot of reviews. This is something my publisher hasn't really been able to do for me, and for my next book I'd like to have a lot of newspaper saturation.

  While reviews can sell books, I don't have much faith that radio or advertising does. At least, I haven't seen their effectiveness when it comes to my own career. Hiring a publicist to get you on NPR could pay off considerably. But getting on Good Morning Sheboygan might not be the best use of your time and money.

  If you're going to self-promote, you need to understand what it is you're doing, and why you're doing it. Spending time and money on vague concepts that you feel you should be doing, without understanding their effects, is pointless and stupid.

I just received an email from someone I don't know hawking a new book which details how to promote your mysteries. A few things struck me immediately when visiting their website.

First, I didn't recognize any of the contributors. I know a lot of folks in the mystery community, but to not recognize any of them makes me wonder how effective they are at self-promoting.

Second, though they have a website, there is very little of substance on it. You'd think a book about how to promote would share some of those tips as a teaser to get you to buy the book. They don't even list a table of contents or an overview of subjects covered. There are four super-brief articles you can click on, but the information they cover is either obvious, small potatoes, or contrary to what I've learned about the business.

But you know what? What I've learned about the business may be contrary to what you've learned about the business. My way certainly isn't the only way, and may not be the right way for you.

Try different things. Figure out for yourself what works. Take advice, and hone it.

If you write books, you should do something to help promote them. Just make sure you understand what it is you're doing, and why.

22 comments

Self-Promotion for Writers

I'm a full time fiction writer. You can find out more about me, and my books, at JAKonrath.com.

While I'm not wildly successful, I make a pretty good living. When I finally landed a book deal, after years of trying and hundreds of rejections, I chose to learn as much as I could about the business.

This is a bit of what I've learned. Included in this packet are the following:

SELF PROMO BASICS

BOOKSIGNINGS

INTERNET

SAMPLE MARKETING PLAN

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

SAMPLE PUBLISHER QUESTIONAIRE

Even more about the publishing world can be found on my website and blog, www.jakonrtah.blogspot.com.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JA Konrath is the writer of the Lt. Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels thriller series, of which DIRTY MARTINI is the latest. He's published stories and articles in a variety of publications. You can visit him at many of the sites mentioned in this article, or you can just Google "Konrath" and you'll find him.

SELF PROMO BASICS

You worked your butt off writing the book, and worked even harder finding a publisher.

But now the REAL work begins.

There will be close to 200,000 books published this year. Only one out of five will make money.

You want to be that one. But the odds say you won't be. I know dozens of published authors who can't get another contact because of poor prior sales. They all have the same, dazed look in their eyes, wondering what happened. Some blame their publisher. Some blame their agent. Some blame fate.

But have any of them blamed themselves?

When you write a book, it's your name on the cover. You should be the one who dictates its success or failure.

It's your book. It's your job to sell it.

Here are some marketing and self promotional tips that will help:

1. Create a Website

Every author needs a home page. It's a 24 hour advertisement for your book. But the best web pages, the ones that keep people coming back, are more than just ads. They focus on what they have to offer, rather than what they have to sell.

To make your site sticky, there are many things you can do:

Offer free stuff. Stories, excerpts, writing tips, downloads, etc. Update these often, to keep people coming back.

Hold a contest.

Host a message board.

Add content on a weekly basis. Even if it's just a new tip or a new appearance. Change is what brings people back.

Have a links page, and reciprocate with peers.

Don't link to Amazon or BN.com — indie bookstores hate that, and many will hold it against you. I'd suggest linking to www.booksense.com instead.

Offer press materials on your site. A downloadable press release, pic, bio, background, etc.

Make yourself a presence on the internet. Join newsgroups, chat rooms, other author's message boards. Join writing organizations (SFWA, ITW, HWA, MWA, RWA, etc).

Add your website to your email signature.

DON'T pay for advertising. How often do you click on banners? Neither does anyone else. Pay-per-click search engines and web-rings are a waste of time in my opinion, and I've studied them well.

Pass out business cards with your website on it to everyone. I include cards in all mail I send out (letters, bills, payments). I pass them out to people I meet. I have my URL on every piece of promo material I hand out (flyers, event announcements, etc).

2. Conventions

Conventions can be expensive, but they are immeasurably valuable in getting your name out there, and if you're savvy, and use them wisely, they can be the biggest bang for your promotional buck.

Here's what I do:

a) Pick the conventions that you'll benefit from most. As a mystery author, Bouchercon is essential for me. Malice Domestic, while a fun mystery conference, caters mostly to cozy writers, and I write thrillers, so I don't attend that one. You have to be choosy.

b) Register in advance. This will assure you get on a speaking panel, and that you pay the lowest price (most cons have early bird pricing specials). It will also make the hotel fee and plane fare less of a burden if the registration has been paid for months earlier. Most convention costs are between $50 and $175 (for the three day conventions). If money is tight, save in advance. Have a jar that you put extra change in. Give up smoking or gum or dessert, and put the money you would have spent on that towards a convention. Try to get your publisher to go halvsies with you.

c) Priceline.com and Expedia. Hotels usually offer discounts for convention-goers, but you can almost always get a better deal by using Priceline or Expedia. Priceline lets you name your own price. I recently stayed in Muncie for Magna Cum Murder for $30 a night, when everyone else was paying $95.

It also isn't necessary to stay at the hotel the convention is being held at. It's convenient, but if you can save major money by staying at a nearby hotel, do it. At Bouchercon I didn't stay at either of the convention hotels ($220 a night). I stayed a mile away ($50 a night), and also had a roommate to split the costs (so it came out to $25 a night). Often the person running the convention can put out the word that you're looking for a roommate.

Airfare can also vary dramatically. Join the internet discount programs for all the major airlines (they send you weekly internet fare specials). I just flew from Chicago to NY for $49 each way.

d) Pack food and alcohol. Restaurants and bars are a great place to meet and schmooze, but you don't need to eat and drink there. Packing a sandwich can save you a $20 lunch. Packing a bottle of rum or a case of beer will cost less than if you spend the night drinking in the bar, and then you can invite people up to drink in your room, which will make you very popular.

I can't stress enough how much meeting and greeting is done at conventions. And if you tell a group of authors/fans/convention goers that "I've got a case of beer on ice in my room", people will follow you, and love you for it.

e) Make the convention count. Pass out business cards to everyone. EVERYONE. Bring flyers for the goodie table. Bring hand-outs. Make sure you know the bookseller beforehand, and that they have your book. Bring extra copies of your book, just in case. Get the extra copies from a local bookseller, rather than from your publisher, because then they count towards your sales. A local indie store who likes you will order copies and sell them to you at cost —a 40% discount off cover price.

Also, NEVER sell your own book unless the bookseller is out of stock. And if they are out of stock, offer to give the bookseller copies on consignment —-assuming you got them at discount —- and pass the same discount off to the seller. You DO NOT want to make money selling books yourself. You want the bookseller to make money, so they like you and keep ordering your books and handselling them.

Carry a copy of your book around with you at the con. Hand it to people to look at. Try to meet as many people as you can —that means sitting down with strangers at lunchtime, joining conversations when you don't know anyone there, speaking to authors you've never met or even heard of, and smiling the whole time.

A successful convention won't just boost your sales, it will boost your word-of-mouth. People will talk about you afterwards. You'll be discussed in bookstores, in libraries, and on newsgroups.

If you prepare for your panels and are engaging, informative, and funny, that is the best advertising you can ever have. If you meet people and seem genuinely interested in talking to them, you'll be remembered.

You must be part entertainer, part salesperson, and part ambassador at a convention. If you plan carefully, a convention can be the best thing you do for your career.

And plan on taking a day or two off after the convention ends —-you'll be exhausted.

3. Library Talks

Go to www.publiclibraries.org to fin them in your area.

There's no greater fear than public speaking. Introducing yourself to a stranger is tough. It takes guts, confidence, fearlessness, and a willingness to keep trying, even in the face of rejection.

Sort of like what it takes to get published.

Writers are public figures —even the terminally shy ones. There are wallflowers who never do signings, or never speak at libraries. And some of them sell a lot of books. But they aren't selling as many as they could.

Though I wouldn't suggest anyone do anything outside of their comfort zone, with education and encouragement comfort zones can change.

Getting a rejection in the mail is tough. Sitting at a table and having no one buy your book is a lot harder. Trust me on this. It's degrading, humiliating, and makes you feel worthless. Take all the self-doubt, depression, and dashed hopes of every rejection you've ever had, and multiply them by ten. That's how it feels, being ignored by patrons in a bookstore.

If you worked your butt off to get published, you might consider the next step.

Join a local Toastmasters. Take a public speaking course at a local community college. Take a part time job waiting tables.

All of these are options open to you. And believe me, getting through a public speakign course is much easier than selling a book. ANYONE can learn to speak in public. Not everyone can get published.

When you dreamt of becoming a writer, you had no limits. Why impose limits now?

4. Chapbooks

Question for everyone:

How many times have you bought a book that you learned about from a promotional bookmark?

I've gone to dozen of conferences, and have picked up over a hundred bookmarks. I've never bought a book because of a bookmark.

I buy books for three reasons:

1. It's the type of book I normally buy.

2. I know/have met the author

3. It's not the type of book I normally buy, but the books sounds interesting.

A bookmark will not persuade someone to buy a book. It could possibly alert fans who already might buy the book, but your book is sci-fi —-how many diehard sci-fi fans collect bookmarks?

A flyer is cheaper, bigger (so you can fit more info on it), and will also alert potential buyers. Or your business card can have all that info, and people tend to keep businnes cards (at least I do).

When deciding upon advertising or promotional material, you should figure out what convinces YOU to buy books, then do that.

A free, limited edition chapbook (which you can print up for about 9 cents each, by buying paper and cardstock in bulk and refilling your own inkjet carts) is a much better bang for your buck.

Or a booklet featuring the first chapter of your book, handed out to potential fans. This gives people a taste of your writing, gives them something they'll keep (a limited, numbered edition is collectible, and a lot of book buyers are collectors), and also serves as an advertisement for your book (website URL, blurbs, reviews, excepts, bio).

A bookmark has your book cover, ISBN, and a short blurb or excerpt.

I recently talked to a fan who had a promotional bookmark which she was using in the books she was reading. I asked her: "You kept that bookmark. Have you bought the book?"

You can guess her answer.

I've done seven different chapbooks, and printed 200 copies of each.

The first chapbook I ever made was for a short story featuring the lead character from my novel, Whiskey Sour. The story was about 4000 words, and fit onto 16 chapbook pages.

Here's how it works. You write a story using for favorite word processor. Then you change the paper size (in the WP program) from 8.5 x 11 to 11 X 8.5. So instead of the pages being eleven inches long, they are now eleven inches wide.

Then divide the entire story into two columns, using the word processor. So each full page will have two pages printed on the front, and two pages printed on the back. (take apart any staple-bound magazine and it will have four pages printed on each piece of paper).

When you print the chapbook, use the command to print it as a booklet. Your printer will automatically print it in order, so when it's folded and stapled, the pages all look like a real book. This requires feeding in each sheet twice.

So my 16 page book was actually four paper pages, folded in half and with printing on both sides. Plus a cardstock cover.

The front cover looked like a book cover. The inside had the copyright info. The margins were all justified, and I adjusted font size until the text took up all 16 pages (you have to think in multiples of four, because anything less will give you blank pages at the end).

The inside back cover had an author photo and bio. The back cover was a blurb for the short story, plus info about WHISKEY SOUR and my website.

The second chapbook I printed had an excerpt from WHISKEY SOUR, plus a short story.

The third had a short story that tied into WHISKEY SOUR.

The fourth had some horror short stories that I gave out at a horror convention (a different crowd than the mystery crowd. I played up the serial killer angle of WHISKEY SOUR, rather than the mystery angle.)

The fifth was a reprint of #2.

The sixth and seventh were a new mystery short story that tied into WHISKEY SOUR, and a new horror short story that tied into WHISKEY SOUR.

All had my bio, website info, and facts about my novel on the back and inside covers.

A chapbook is simply some of your writing that is printed in booklet form. It helps to have it tie into the work you're currently promoting (in my case, my first novel).

Because it's basically a mini-book, people keep them. They store on the shelf next to regular books. In my case, I individually number and sign each booklet and call it a 'signed limited edition.'

I also put a cover price of $2.50 on the booklet. I NEVER sell the booklet, but the cover price makes it look a little more professional, and there's a perceived value to something that has a price on it.

With chapbooks, people don't feel like they're being marketed to —they feel like they're getting a gift.

5. Mailings and Emailings

Marketing is HARD. Self-promotion is the most difficult thing I've ever done in the many careers I've had since my teen years.

I've heard it described: "Marketing isn't selling to people who don't want your book, but finding the people who are waiting for it."

In theory, that's great. Reaching your potential audience is all any writer can ask for.

The problem is; who is your potential audience?

Thriller readers will be interested in my book, so I directly market to them. This includes an email newsletter four times a year, a website that's updated weekly, a constant presence in online groups and forums, an active membership in mystery clubs, and frequent appearances at conferences.

Besides thriller readers, my book also has the potential to reach ANY readers. That's why I visit libraries, do bookstore signings, and speak to writer's groups and book clubs. Someone may have never read a mystery in their life, but upon meeting me, may be persuaded to pick up my book.

Finally, there are the people who really don't read a lot. They don't visit libraries or bookstores. But they might still buy a book. It's a long shot, but I've sold books to people who have never bought a book in their life.

Now, the most effective marketing is to your core potential audience. When I send out a newsletter, i send it out to everyone in my address book. These are mostly libraries, bookstores, fellow writers, and people who have signed up. But the newsletter also goes out to friends, family, and anyone who I've emailed, for whatever reason.

I try not to make my newsletter intrusive. I don't hardsell. I always offer free stuff, giveaways, and hold contests, along with listing recent publications. I try to entertain as well as inform. And I always offer to remove anyone from the list who doesn't want to be there.

Still, whenever I send out a newsletter, I never fail to anger somebody. People who think I'm being pushy. People who think I'm spamming them.

And, in their eyes, I am.

But in my eyes, I have to risk annoying a few people in order to get the message out to those who would like to hear it.

I'm betting that famous author who sent you the email has a program that automatically sends newsletters out to everyone in her addressbook.

Or I'm betting the writer simply forgot about the blurb. I'm a newbie, with no reputation, and I've got about 60 manuscripts sitting on my desk from people who'd like me to blurb/offer advice/critique/pass on to my agent etc. It's daunting.

I try my best to help these writers out, but my free time is limited, and I need some time to myself or I'll go nuts.

So I try to cut writers some slack in the marketing department, and I hope people cut me some slack.

Marketing is a fine line. Sitting on your butt and not doing anything to promote your book will hurt you.

Being pushy, intrusive and hardselling will also hurt you.

I try to be somewhere in between.

Consider this, Claire: your book is coming out in six months. What are you going to do to sell it?

Will you send out a newsletter? If so, where will you get the names?

Buying a mailing list? I have writer friends who have done this. I consider this SPAMish, but can't condemn it.

Wait for people to sign up for your list? The problem with that is those who sign up already know about your book. How do you reach the potential audience that doesn't know about it yet?

Will you do booksignings? How are you going to react when no one shows up? Are you going to sit at your table behind a big pile of your books, depressed? Or are you going to put on a smile, hold out your hand, and start meeting and greeting people who walk into the bookstore but didn't come to see you?

As I said, marketing is hard.

6. Short stories

Make your website larger. Add more content. Add free stuff. Then put the URL on EVERYTHING (flyers, business cards, in your email signature line, etc. Why isn't your website on your posts here?)

Write a press release, a brochure, a flyer, and a bio package. I have examples of all on my website www.jakonrath.com.

Find reviewers. Make sure they get copies. Surf the net for newspaper reviewers, website reviewers, and magazine and radio reviewers.

Attend conferences. Network with your peers. Join clubs/groups/organizations.

Don't bother with: bookmarks, advertising, cute promo items like pencils, candy, mugs, etc.

Do bother with: free stories, chapbooks, business cards, and flyers.

WRITE SHORT STORIES!!!!

That's so important I'll say it again.

WRITE SHORT STORIES!!!!!

The easiest, and best, way to reach the core fans is to get stories in Asimov, Analog, Weird Tales, etc. This isn't easy, but you'll reach thousands of people without paying a cent (they'll pay you). Make sure your author bio includes your website and your book title.

Contact your publicist at your publisher. Show her your marketing plan. Ask how you can help them sell your book.

Keep copies of your book in you car; you never know when you'll meet a potential reader. Buy these from a local indie bookstore —not from your publisher! Books bought from your publisher don't count towards your sales numbers.

Talk to fellow writers. Ask what the good venues are, and what their good experiences have been. Get contact names.

Volunteer. Donate books to charity auctions. Help out with local or national organizations that have to do with sci-fi. Meet fans.

I'm a fulltime writer. Seventy percent of my time is self-promotion. Thirty percent is writing. I think the term 'writer' is a misnomer.

Learn to speak in public, if you haven't yet.

Learn to pitch your book, aloud, in less than 20 seconds. You should know this pitch so well you can say it in your sleep.

Teach writing classes. You'll learn from your students, and it will help you crystalize your agenda.

Get in touch with local papers/cable tv/radio. Find an angle or hook that's appropriate to your book. Just writing a book isn't enough to get press —you have to put a spin on it and make it relevant to current events or everyday life.

7. Do ten things, every day, to promote yourself and your books.

Sales is part of the job. If you don't do it, don't expect to be in this business very long.

One of the saddest parts of Bouchercon was listening to mid-list authors —people who have had three or four books published —talk about being unable to publish anymore, because their sales weren't good.

They all thought their publisher would sell the books. I'm sure their publisher did their best, but my experience has been that publishers use the 'spaghetti theory' when promoting books. They throw a bunch at the wall and see what sticks, and then that one gets the publicity money.

Be the one that sticks.

DO NOT hire a publicist, or pay for large ads. Your time and money will be better spent doing the things I mentioned, many of which can be done on the internet.

Promoting is tough. You'll get discouraged. You'll get humiliated. You'll get depressed. But don't give up.

If you're being led to the gas chamber, go kicking and screaming. What have you got to lose?

How to do Drive-By Signings

Your book has made it into the stores! Congratulations!

Your publisher/distributor/sales reps have done their jobs —-now it's time to do yours.

Four out of five books don't earn back their advance. Half of all books are returned, remaindered, or destroyed. You can accept this as a fact of the business, or you can take the wheel of your career and do something to improve your odds.

Autographed books sell better than their unsigned counterparts. Customers regard authors as celebrities, and a signed book is a value-added purchase.

But how likely is it that your publisher will set up a signing at every bookstore in America? Especially when each store carries just three copies of your magnum opus?

The answer: The Drive-By Signing. You drive up, you go in, you sign the stock, you get out.

For my thriller novels Whiskey Sour and Bloody Mary, I've done over 400 drive-by signings in the past 18 months, leaving my signature on several thousand books, meeting thousands of people.

Sound impossible? It's actually pretty easy to do, once you know the routine.

1. Find the stores.

Go to www.bookweb.org, www.booksense.com, www.bn.com, www.waldenbooks.com, www.american-stores.us/book, www.borders.com, www.booksamillion.com, and search for stores by city and zip code. Or go to the public library and look through the phone books. Try to list all the stores within 50 miles of your home, or within 25 miles of the town you're visiting.

2. Call the stores you intend to drop in on.

You need to find out if the store still exists, what time they close, and if they carry your books.

DO NOT tell them you're the author. Why? All that does is complicate things. They'll say you have to speak to a manager, or an events coordinator, or they'll say you aren't allowed to come in unless it has been cleared by your publisher, or they'll say that they don't do signings, or they'll set the books aside and then no one will be able to find them when you come in, or you'll set everything up and when you get there no one will know who the heck you are, or... you get the point. Bookstores and publishers have a set of rules about author signings.

You want to bypass those rules. So call and see if they have copies, and ask how many. I wouldn't drive 20 miles to sign three paperbacks, but for three hardcovers I would.

Call a day or two before you plan on dropping by —-calling ten days before may result in your books being gone by then.

3. Map out your route.

Use city maps, or Internet sites such as www.mapquest.com, www.maps.yahoo.com, www.maps.google.com. Plot a course going location to location. A GPS navigation unit is heaven sent for touring authors, and saves a lot of time and effort.

Many Barnes & Noble and Borders stores often have locations just a few miles from one another.

Shopping malls often have a Waldenbooks or B. Dalton.

Independent booksellers are generally happier to see you, and more eager to sell your books. Fit as many of these into the drop-in tour as possible.

4. When you get to a store, find your own books.

Booksellers are busy, and you want to be low maintenance and take up very little of their time.
Take your books to the Information Desk, or to a counter, and say your spiel to an employee. Mine is:

"Hi! This is me. (Smiling, pointing to my name on cover.) I'm an author. Great to meet you. (Shake hand.) Thanks for carrying my books! Do you mind if I sign them?"

Start signing when you get the 'yes.' You'll always get a 'yes' (though once I was asked for ID, which I provided.)

Then ask them if they like your genre, and tell them about your books.

While talking to the employee, give them something —-a card, a bookmark, or in my case, a drink coaster with my book cover on it, and SIGN THE ITEM. Signing it will hopefully prevent them from throwing the item away, on the off chance that one day you'll be famous and they can sell it on eBay.

Also, ask them if they can check to see if there are any more in the store that you couldn't find. Be patient —-if the store is busy, let them take care of customers before you. That gives you a chance to pitch to customers as well.

When the books are signed, ask if they have stickers that say "Autographed Copy". If they do, help them sticker the books. If they don't, use your own stickers, which you took from the last store you signed at.

Barnes & Noble have square green stickers. Borders and Waldenbooks have red triangles. Sometimes Waldenbooks have blue rectangles, and Borders have brown rectangles. Don't get confused.

After the books are signed and stickered, ask the employees to read them.

"You'll enjoy this, I promise."

A bookstore employee who meets you and reads you is one that will forever sell you.

Often they'll make a display for you. Don't suggest a display yourself —let them suggest it. This appeal for help is important —it shows you're not a snooty author, but a regular person who needs them.

I also tell employees that whoever sells 20 copies or more will be mentioned in the acknowledgements for my next book, and give them my personal email so they can contact me.

6. Meet as many employees in the store that you can.

Thank them profusely for selling your book, and for the great job they're doing. Take their business cards, and add them to your email newsletter list.

But don't overstay your welcome. They're there to work, and so are you.

7. If you're at an independent bookstore, never leave without buying something.

If you want them to support you, you should support them.

8. Keep a log of where you visited, who you met, and how many copies you signed.

Share this info with your agent and publisher. You don't have to give them the full list, but an email saying, "I was just in Arizona for the weekend and signed stock at 21 bookstores" will impress them.

9. Return to stores a few months later.

Often they'll have new stock and new employees. Many stores automatically buy more copies after a book sells. I've visited some stores five or six times, and I always meet new people and sign more books.

Obviously, your local bookstores are the ones you'll visit the most. But whenever you leave town on business, or for vacation, check to see what bookstores are in the area before you go.

Final Words: If you're planning on touring, you'll get the most bang for your buck with large cities. A major metropolis like Chicago or Manhattan has over 100 bookstores. Even smaller cities like Phoenix, Denver, Houston, or Indianapolis have a few dozen stores, which is well worth your time.

When planning a drive-by tour, sooner is better. If you wait six months after your book comes out, you may discover your books are no longer there.

If you don't have time to tour, try to visit every bookstore in your area, and set aside time during business trips and on vacation to hit a few stores in the area. The more places you visit, the more it will help your career.

Contrary to popular belief, signed books *can be* returned or destroyed. But it's less likely they will be, especially if you were nice to the staff.

In today's market, even bestselling writers must do their own publicity, or else they won't be writers for very long. Drive-by signings are only one weapon in your publicity arsenal. But if done correctly, they can be the most powerful weapon you have.

How to Make a Disastrous Booksigning Event a Success

No aspect of a writer's job offers more opportunity for euphoria (and anxiety) than a booksigning. But how do these events really go down?

The Fantasy. Your escort picks us up at the airport and drives you to the largest bookstore in the state. She tells you they've advertised the event in the three local papers and on the radio. When you arrive, there are a hundred fans already waiting. You meet the excited staff and sit behind a table stocked with a huge pile of books, under a giant color poster of your cover. You read a chapter aloud, receive thunderous applause, and then do a quick Q & A before signing for a solid 90 minutes, people waiting patiently in an endless line to tell you how much they love you.

The Reality. You arrive at the bookstore ten minutes early. There's no crowd of fans —-there's not even one. No posters, no signs, no table full of books. The employees look at you like you've grown a second nose when you say you're the author and there to sign. Finally you convince someone to help you and they unearth a box of your books and set up a small table for you in the rear of the store, near the washrooms. You sit there for two hours, each second an eternity. People try hard to avoid eye-contact when they pass. Some approach you and ask where The DaVinci Code is. One will always come over and say, "So you're an author? I've got a lot of ideas. How about I tell them to you, you write them, and we'll split the millions?" No one buys a book. It's debasing, humiliating, discouraging, and you vow to never do this again.

The Plan. But it doesn't have to be that way. With proper preparation, and a little bit of self-confidence, you can do very well at bookstore signings even if your last name isn't Clancy. Here's how.

A Month Before the Event. Book the signing yourself by calling or dropping by the bookstore and speaking to a manager or an event coordinator.

Often the store is not very receptive —-author events don't ever go well. Convince them that yours will, because you have a different way of doing things.

If you're with a small publisher, your books may be difficult or impossible to order. Offer to bring the books in yourself and give the bookseller the standard 40% discount.

If you're with a large publisher, they might refuse to pay the store co-op money (publishers pay stores to host events, often between fifty and several hundred dollars.)

If that's the case, the store won't be allowed to host a signing. Tell them you don't want to do an official signing, but rather a drop-in just to sign stock. Then make sure they have at least twenty copies available.

Two weeks before the event. Advertising is up to you. Make a flyer featuring the date and time of the signing, your book cover, and a few blurbs. Send the bookstore 100 copies.

List the event on your website and in your newsletter, with an address and a phone number for the bookstore.

If you haven't already, make a large (2 'x 3') poster of your book cover and a sign that says "AUTHOR EVENT TODAY." Often your publisher will do this for you; just ask when you receive the cover art. Or you can have one made from a digital file at any copy shop, like Fed-Ex Kinkos.

Three days before the event. Call the store and make sure they have copies of your book in. If they don't, remind them that you can bring copies of your own.

Most authors get discounted copies from their publisher. Instead, I suggest you buddy up with a local independent bookstore owner, and ask if she can sell you copies at her 40% discount. That way, they count toward your royalties.

How do you become friends with a local indie? Make them your base of operations, and have anyone who wants a signed copy go through them. Also, use them for your initial booklaunch party —-they'll be happy to help you out after that.

Day of the event. Make sure you have the essentials; 100 business cards with your website on them, flyers that feature some blurbs and reviews, some mints (so your breath stays fresh), some bottled water (hydration is important), and a nametag that says "AUTHOR."

Dress. Business casual or better. Shaved, bathed, combed, made up and smelling nice.

Upon arrival. Get there fifteen minutes early to set up. Your first order of business is to introduce yourself to EVERY employee in the bookstore. Shake their hands. Give them a signed business card. Briefly tell them what your book is about, and let them know you'll be there for a few hours.

Bring pizza or donuts for the staff. Employees are used to bigshot authors snubbing them. Be a bigshot author who appreciates them, and they'll champion your books for life.

Set up. Sometimes the bookstore has already set up a table for you. Try to get one at the front of the store. If not, no problem —-you can work around it.

Put your flyers and some business cards on the table, and hang your poster in a prominent place. Make sure your books are arranged in an attractive manner.

An employee might offer you a chair. Kindly tell them you don't need one—you'll be on your feet for the whole event.

Ready, Set, Go! If you're lucky, some people may have come to see you. Usually this isn't the case. You're a new, unknown author. All of your friends and family have already bought your book. Even if the event has had heavy advertising and publicity, would you go to see an author you've never heard of before?

Neither will anyone else.

The only way you'll move your wares is through determination, personality, and fearlessness.

Put on your smile, stick out your hand, and get ready to greet EVERY PERSON that comes into the bookstore.

Does that terrify you? It shouldn't. People are excited to meet authors. You're a minor celebrity. Everyone likes to meet celebrities.

Don't worry about being rebuffed or ignored. You've dealt with rejection before. You're a writer, and rejection is part of the business.

The Approach. People will be preoccupied when they walk into a bookstore. Some are on a mission to buy the new Harry Potter, or latest issue of Guns and Ammo. Some are there to browse genres other than the one you're writing in.

But all people, no matter their reason for being there, will respond when you introduce yourself and offer to shake hands.

I use one of two lines:

"Are you a mystery fan? I'm a mystery writer." or "Hi, I'm an author. Do you like thrillers?"

It's extremely rare that a person will ignore an outstretched hand —-it's only happened to me three times, and I've shaken thousands of hands.

The Pitch. If I get a yes to one of the above questions, I launch into my pitch.

"My name is JA Konrath. I write a mystery series about a Chicago cop named Jack Daniels. Jack is short for Jacqueline, and she's in her forties, divorced, has a train wreck for a personal life, but she's great at her job. She chases serial killers."

If they still seem interested at this point (about 1 out of 5) I continue:

"The book is actually very funny, similar to Janet Evanovich or Dave Barry. But it also has a darker side, kind of like James Patterson or Hannibal Lecter/Silence of the Lambs. So it goes from laugh out loud funny, to pretty scary —you'll want to turn on the lights and make sure the doors and windows are locked when you're reading."

It's important to maintain eye contact and keep smiling. Then finish your pitch.

"Whiskey Sour is the first book in a new series. The second is Bloody Mary. They've won several wards and appeared on some bestseller lists. I'd love to sign a copy or two for you — and if you like, I can make it out to EBay."

Relax and Be Casual. No one likes high pressure sales. Selling isn't about forcing people to buy something they don't want. It's about finding the people who are looking for your product.

And yes, books are products. Publishing is a business. Take off the artist hat, and put on the salesperson hat. If you're shy, or have low self esteem, take a public speaking class. The better you can talk to people, the further you'll go in this career.

The Hand Off. While doing the spiel I'll hand them the book itself. That connection is important. Holding something implies ownership, and you want them to look at the cover, read the jacket, and begin to think of this book as theirs.

Adjustments. I tailor the pitch depending on the person's interest. Often I ask questions. Sometimes I answer questions. I adjust the pitch to the individual (if a customer likes romances, I play up the romantic end. If they like thrillers, I downplay the comedy, etc.)

The Rejection. Most people won't be interested, even after hearing your wonderful pitch. That doesn't mean you should move along yet.

Hand them a flyer to look at, or autograph a business card or bookmark, and ask them to pass it along to anyone they know who is a fan of your kind of books.

Thank them for their time, and mention it was great meeting them. Also let them know that you'll be around for a while, if they decide they want something signed.

Often people come back. Sometimes while you're there. Sometimes days later.

The Acceptance. If they buy a copy, be genuinely grateful. I once did a signing with an author who grumbled, "I hate signing books" in front of the person he was autographing it for. The fan's jaw hit the floor. I don't recommend that approach.

Thank the customer for giving you a try, and ask them who they'd like the book personalized to. ALWAYS ask for them to spell the name, even if it's "Kim," (I had a Kymm once.)

Then thank them again, shake hands again, and give them the biggest smile you can give.
Enlisting the Staff. Large chain stores will often make announcements. Ask if they can announce you every half hour, or if you can make the announcements yourself.

"Today we have local author J.A. Konrath —-that's me —-signing books from the Jack Daniels series. I encourage everyone of come over to front of the store and say hello. Autographed books make a great gift, for family, friends, or yourself."

If the staff really likes you (and if you brought them pizza, they will) ask if they can pass out flyers, or walk around holding copies of your book and directing patrons to your table.

Does it Work? Typically, 1 out of 5 people I pitch to will buy the book. And I pitch to several dozen an hour —depending on how busy the store is.

I did an event last Saturday, and sold 40 hardcover books in 6 hours. The week before I did 40 books in 8 hours (store wasn't as crowded). Week before, 60 books in 8 hours. My record is 120 in ten hours.

It isn't easy getting a stranger to part with $22. Sometimes there are stretches when I approach 30 people and can't sell a single book. It's disheartening, depressing, and just plain awful.

Other times, I'll sell five books in three minutes —one person buys it and others will wander over to check out what's going on.

To date, using this method I've handsold over 2000 books.

Time to Leave. How long you stay is up to you. I think four hours is minimum, and if the store is really busy I'll stay for six or more.

When you're finally ready to go, you should once again thank the booksellers —they watched you bust your butt and are on your side.

If you didn't sell every copy, ask to sign the remaining stock, and affix stickers that say "signed by the author."

If the store doesn't have stickers, use the ones you borrowed from the last place you signed at —-the employees shouldn't mind if you ask to take some extras, and you should always keep a supply of stickers on you from various chain stores.

If you brought your own books, don't ask to be paid upfront —-that's bad business. Leave your contact information and let them know they can mail a check.

Most importantly, ask to come back in a month or two. I visit some local stores five times a year. Signed books really do well during the holidays.

Staying Positive. Every time I come into a bookstore and see that big stack of my books, I get a little sick inside. There's no way I'll sell all of those, I think. No one will come in to the store. People will ignore me. My pitch is crummy and won't work. The staff is laughing behind my back. I'm a writer, not a salesperson. Then I remind myself that the Great Wall of China was built one brick at a time, and that's how I'll sell my books —one at a time.

Each book you handsell is a book that never would have sold without your efforts.

Each person you meet is likely to talk about you to others.

Each reader who becomes a fan will become a fan for life and remember the time they shook your hand.

Each bookstore you visit will have employees who will handsell you for weeks, months, and even years after you've gone.

In my acknowledgements page on my latest book, I have a list of a dozen booksellers that I thank, because they've each handsold at least twenty copies of my first novel.

In the next book, I'll be thanking over fifty booksellers. One particular bookseller has helped me sell over 300 hardcovers at one location. I named a character after him in my third book.

Your Goal. There's no reason a booksigning has to be a stressful, unpleasant experience. In reality it is one of the cheapest, most-effective ways to build your career.

It's your name on the book's cover, and it's your job to sell it. Sales is just like writing —-the more you do, the better you become, the more success you achieve.Now go get 'em, tiger!

Six Keys to a Successful Bookstore Pitch

1. Introduce yourself with a smile.
2. Explain the book's premise, setting, and lead character in just a few seconds.
3. Compare your books to well known books the reader will recognize (It's like a chick-lit version of Silence of the Lambs…)
4. Ask the customer a question. (Who do you like to read? What book did you come in for?)
5. Offer to sign and personalize a copy for them.
6. Thank them, whether they buy a copy or not.

Signing Survival Kit

*Snacks for Bookstore Employees
*3 Good Pens
*100 Business Cards
*50 Flyers
*Poster of Book Cover
*Sign saying "Author Signing Today"
*Mints (gum annoys people)
*Bottled water
*Extra "Autographed Copy" stickers
*A Big Smile and a Good Attitude

How to Survive a Book Tour

You just found out your publisher is sending you on a tour. You're surprised, excited, grateful… and terrified. You've heard other others complain about how grueling and disappointing tours are, even with all-expenses paid.

So what can you expect? How can you make sure your experience is a good one for you, the bookstores, and your publisher?

I just went on my very first tour —-eight cities in eleven days —-to promote my new hardcover thriller BLOODY MARY, and the paperback release of the first book in the Lt. Jack Daniels series, WHISKEY SOUR. I signed 933 books at 105 bookstores in Colorado, Arizona, California, Oregon, and Washington.

Here are 15 things I learned while on the road.

TOUR TIP #1: Use a GPS.

Your publisher will set up official signings for you, and possibly some publicity opportunities such as radio and TV interviews, library talks, and speeches.

Sometimes they provide escorts—those folks who pick you up at the airport and drive you around.

A cheaper, and better, alternative is a GPS Tracker. GPS stands for Global Positioning Satellite. Navman, Nextell, Magellon, and Garmin are some of the big names. These units are mini-computers that attach to the window of your car. You program in addresses, then they visually and verbally direct you to your destination. The best models have millions of addresses pre-programmed into their memory, tell you when you'll reach your destination, and offer alternative routes if traffic is bad.

A GPS takes a lot of the stress out of being on tour. They can be added to your rental car, or purchased for a few hundred dollars. If you're an author, you need one as much as you need a website and a cell phone.

TOUR TIP #2: Always allow yourself more time than you think you need to get to a destination.

Sometimes traffic is bad. Sometimes you stay at a store longer than expected. Sometimes you have car trouble.

For scheduled events, always plan on getting there 45 minutes early. If you're going to be late, phone them as soon as you know. But try not to be late.

TOUR TIP #3: At an official signing, work the room before you begin.

Introduce yourself to the bookstore employees, and bring gifts (I give them a signed bottle of Jack Daniels). Thank them for having you. Praise their store.

Then give each person who showed up a handshake and warm welcome.

Bestselling thriller author Barry Eisler is a master at this —-he always arrives early and talks to each member of the audience before he begins. It takes a few extra minutes, but you'll have the crowd on your side before you begin, and customers and fans love the personal touch.

Be upbeat and show you're happy to be there, even if you get a small crowd. If no one shows up at all, hang out with the booksellers and talk shop —-your positive attitude will be remembered.

TOUR TIP #4: Rehearse your presentation, but pay attention to your response.

At an event, you'll be asked to speak, or read, or answer questions, or all of the above. Be sure you have something prepared for all possible scenarios.

Monologues are boring and can be done in an empty room. Storytelling is an active, dynamic thing that requires the audience to participate. If they aren't involved, get them involved by making eye contact, asking questions, and smiling. Watch out for speech hesitations (ummm and uhhhh), get to the point quickly, and don't drone on too long.

If you're afraid to speak in public, get over it. If you're unsure of how you present yourself, have a friend videotape you, and watch the recording later.

TOUR TIP #5: Publicly acknowledge your people.

If you have friends or family in the audience, big fans who traveled a long distance to see you, or published authors in the room, thank them by name when you do your presentation.

Also thank the bookstore and the employees again.

Most people love to be mentioned—though some are easily embarrassed. Ask beforehand if it's okay you say their name in front of the crowd.

TOUR TIP #6: When reading, be brief (no more than ten minutes), and if appropriate, be funny.

Practice until you're smooth and confident. Use inflection and different tones for the characters. Smile while you read —-it comes through in your voice.

Also, make sure the passage you've picked to read won't offend anyone. Avoid graphic language, sex, or violence —-unless you're reading at a horror convention.

Glance up at your audience often to gauge their reaction and draw them further into your words —-people pay closer attention if they see you're looking at them.

Not good at reading? Get good at it, or don't do it at all. A poor reader hurts more than helps her cause.

TOUR TIP #7: When signing, always ask who they'd like the book inscribed to, and how to spell their name.

I've met Aymee, Jym, Marscha, Debbera, and Chuk, to misname a few.

Have a few witty phrases that you can use when needed. Since my books are named after drinks, I often write "Don't Read and Drive!" or "Enjoy in Moderation!"

Take your time when signing to avoid mistakes —-those books get returned and destroyed.

TOUR TIP #8: Don't leave without signing everything.
Even if no one comes to your signing, ask to sign all the stock and any posters. Also ask if they have stickers that say "Autographed Copy" to put on the books.

If they don't have stickers, supply your own. Each time you visit a chain store and sign, ask to take a few extra stickers, so you have some for the next store that can't find theirs.

TOUR TIP #9: When signing at an independent store, always buy something before you leave.

Support the folks who support you. If there are no books on your want-list, ask for recommendations from the employees.

If you're signing with another author, or several authors, buy their books. We're all in the same boat, and need to help one another.

This business is all about building contacts and relationships, and generosity goes a long way.

TOUR TIP #10: Do drive-by signings.

Even if your schedule is packed, you'll have some extra time to stop by other local bookstores. Signing stock and introducing yourself to bookstore employees is always a smart idea when you're in a new town. It builds word of mouth and good will. Award-winning mystery author Julia Spencer-Fleming calls it a *force multiplier*; the more people you get on your side, the better.

Your publisher will appreciate the extra effort you're making. I had eight scheduled signings, but I signed at 97 *extra* bookstores during the tour. Everyone at my publishing house was in awe —-which can't hurt when you're negotiating your next contract.

When you do drop-ins, always have something to give the bookstore employees.

I give them an autographed coaster with my book title, WHISKEY SOUR, on the front. Signed things get kept, and you'll be remembered.

TOUR TIP #11: When planning your drive-by itinerary, phone first.

Some stores close early. Some stores change locations. Some stores don't carry your books.

Use the local phonebooks, Mapquest.com, and your good old GPS to help plot your course. If there's a Borders, there's often a Barnes & Noble nearby. Most malls have a bookstore. Genre stores can be found through Internet searches, or through writers organizations like RWA, MWA, HWA, and SFWA.

Call to make sure they're open and they stock your titles.

TOUR TIP #12: At drive-by signings, get in and get out.

Save time by finding your books on the shelf and bringing them to the Information Desk to sign them. Ask the staff to check if there are more copies. Sometimes there are others in the stockroom, or on end caps that you didn't see.

After you've done signing your books and talking to the staff, get out of there. Lingering makes you look bad, and besides, you have more bookstores you have to visit.

TOUR TIP #13: Pay for as much as you can on your own.

Your publisher is sending you to work, not on a vacation. They pay for transportation and lodging. Pay-per-view movies, the beer in the honor bar, and room service are not options if you ever want to be toured again.

If your publisher gives you an expense account, use it wisely. No alcohol, dinner for friends, or theater tickets.

Show your publisher you're a pro who wants to save them money, and they'll reward you with more locations on your next tour.

TOUR TIP #14: Be good to yourself.

After visiting ten stores a day for a week straight, everything began to blur. I couldn't remember what store I was in, where I parked, or what my books were about.

When that happens, take a little break. Sit down. Eat something. Call home. Hearing friendly voices helps you clear your head.

It's important to dress well, look fresh, and stay healthy. This might be the only time people have a chance to meet you. Make a good impression.

I take a bottle of water with me everywhere to stay hydrated (dry mouth is common on tour), and always try to get at least six hours of sleep per night.

TOUR TIP #15: Let your publisher know how things are going.

They'll be following your tour, calling stores after your events, and checking to make sure you arrived at the hotels. But they won't ask you how you're doing.

Communicate with your publicist through email or phone calls, letting her know how everything is going. Stay upbeat and positive, even though you'll be exhausted. If something unusual happens, let them know about it from you, rather than hear about it from someone else.

Remember to thank your publisher for all they are doing for you. Not many authors get toured, and this is a tremendous show of support. Be grateful.

Final words: Publishers don't make money off of book tours, even with bestselling authors. Tours simply cost too much money.

While selling books is important, the main reason for touring is to have the author meet the readers and the booksellers. Building good word-of-mouth, establishing a brand, and making contacts in the business is why you're on the road.

If you stay focused on the big picture, your tour will be a huge success even if you don't sell a single book.

Using The Internet

Let's talk about traffic. Not rush hour bumper-to-bumper traffic, but the Internet kind.

Writing is part art, part craft. But publishing is a business. That means you have to earn money to survive. If you're an author, the secret to earning money is becoming a brand name—an automatic purchase.

The World Wide Web can help you do this. According to www.internetworldstats.com there are over 1 billion people online, and almost 70% of the US population is surfing the net.

Five years ago, only a handful of authors had homepages. Two years ago, very few people knew what a blog or a podcast was. And who could have predicted the amazing success of YouTube, MySpace, and Wikipedia?

No matter what type of writer you are—fiction, non-fiction, even unpublished—this article will help you use the Internet to maximize your brand.

YOUR HOMEPAGE

All authors need a homepage. Yet very few know what to put on it. Many believe it's simply a 24 hour advertisement for your books, requiring no more than a cover jpeg and a few jacket blurbs. Those people are wrong.

Here's the secret to a successful author website; it should be sticky. As the name implies, there should be enough content on your homepage to make people stick around for a while. Content comes in two forms: information and entertainment.

My website, www.JAKonrath.com, features over a hundred pages of content. Besides the standard book excerpts and reviews, I have free short stories, full e-book downloads, dozens of pages of writing tips for newbie authors, contests, a message board, a sign-up newsletter, videos, and funny pictures, along with an updated appearance schedule.

Your website, and everything you do on the net, isn't about what you have to sell. *It's about what you have to offer*.

And don't be concerned about posting your stories. It's doubtful anyone will steal them (and if they do, you can sue because whenever you write something you automatically own the copyright.)

If you're posting stories, or books, you're trying to sell, I recommend taking them offline when you start the submission process. But if they were ever online at some point, no one will mind. Chances are, no one will even know.

YOUR BLOG

A blog (short for *web log*) is a way to directly communicate with people several times a week.

Successful blogs focus on a specific topic, and become forums for like-minded individuals to comment and exchange ideas. Thriller writer Barry Eisler's blog (www.barryeisler.com/blog.html) focuses on politics and language, while chick lit (or more precisely, *mommy lit*) author Melanie Lynne Hauser posts extremely funny anecdotes about motherhood (www.melanielynnehauser.com/wordpress.)

My own blog, A Newbie's Guide to Publishing (www.jakonrath.blogspot.com) features over 300 essays about writing, marketing, and promoting. Often other people—even bestselling authors—disagree with my opinions. This is great. There's no such thing as bad publicity, and controversy draws readers.

Should you be blogging? Yes. But first you need to figure out what your blog is going to be about, and if you can write on that topic three times a week for the rest of your life. I have some tips on how to do this in the sidebar.

If you want to get started blogging, you can for free at www.blogger.com and www.wordpress.com. These sites also provide automatic RSS feeds, which allow readers to subscribe to your blog, rather than check it every day for new content.

You can also blog for free on MySpace.

YOUR MYSPACE

I've heard statistics that www.MySpace.com has four times as many daily visitors than Google. It's easy to see why.

MySpace is all about you. Your favorite books, music, and movies. Your pictures. Your likes and dislikes. Your friends.

If you're a published author, chances are someone has already mentioned you on their MySpace profile. When you put up a MySpace page (which is free) people will come to you, wanting to be your online MySpace Friend. Once someone is your friend, you can send them messages, post comments on their MySpace pages, or even send bulletins to all of your friends at once about your new book release, or magazine sale, or author signing.

But it gets better. You can search for like-minded people as well. I write thrillers similar to Harlan Coben, but they're funny like Christopher Moore. You can bet I looked at Coben's and Moore's MySpace pages and invited their Friends to be my Friends.

YOUR BOOK SITE

Sure, you've got an author homepage, but do you have a site dedicated to a single book?

Taking a cue from the movie industry, authors and publishers have begun creating websites for individual book titles. David Morrell created a whole interactive web experience for his bestseller *Creepers*, featuring the setting from the book at www.theparagonhotel.com and you can visit the www.nextgencode.com, the fiction company Michael Crichton writes about in his novel *Next*. My own more modest effort can be found at www.thesegunsforhire.com, to coincide with the release of an anthology I've edited.

YOUR AMAZON

Amazon.com, the world largest online bookseller, encourages authors to add content to their site in a variety of ways.

www.amazon.com/connect allows published authors to set up their own bio page and blog, which is linked to every book of yours they sell. It lets you to stay in touch with readers who have bought your book through Amazon, and alert them when your new titles are released.

www.amazon.com/shorts allows people to download a short story of yours for 49 cents. It's great for fans who are anxiously awaiting your next book, and it is also a cheap way for a potential buyer to give your writing a try without plunking down the big bucks.

Plus, you make money; every download earns you 20 cents —-which is pretty good considering a paperback sale only nets an author 55 cents.

You don't have to be a novelist to partake in this program, as long as you're published somewhere and Amazon sells that book. Humorous mystery writer Tom Schreck (www.tomschreck.com) has three Shorts on Amazon, and his only prior publishing cred was a story in one of the Chicken Soup books. The success of his Amazon Shorts helped him find a publisher for his novel.

www.amazon.com/listmania allows you to create a list of books that are similar to yours, which comes up as a sidebar when people do searches on those authors. Your recommendations can lead fans of other authors to your books.

www.amazon.com reviews are more than just a way to give your favorite authors a pick me up —-your thoughtful comments about their books can also lead their readers to you.

YOUR AUDIO AND VIDEO

If you're one of the last people on the planet who doesn't have an mp3 player yet, you're ignoring this technology at your own peril.

People love to download audio content, either to their computer, or to their portable players like iPod and Zune.

An mp3 blog is an audio file on your homepage, blog, and/or MySpace, which can be listened to online or downloaded as a file and played on various equipment.

A podcast is an audio file attached to an RSS feed, which allows it to be syndicated.

You can get the audio recording software for free (I use www.audacity.com) and then visit iTunes to make your recording into a podcast, also free.

Your audio blog or podcast can be as simple as you reading your work, or doing an interview, or you can create entire radio shows with music and commercials.

If video is your thing, then visit YouTube.com and upload that clip of you on Good Morning Sheboygan, your book trailer that you created using Flash, or that fan video of you speaking at your last bookstore event. Once you're on YouTube, you can embed the clip in your website, blog, MySpace, and all over the net.

THE REAL SECRET TO INTERNET PROMOTION

The simple fact is: anyone looking for you on the net can find you. While it's good to make your current fanbase happy, most writers are looking for new fans. But how are people going to find you if they don't even know you exist?

You have to lead them to you.

Every time you send an email with your URL in your signature line, post on your blog, leave comments in a forum, exchange links with another author, join a Yahoo Group, make a MySpace friend, upload a YouTube video, or add connected to your blog or website, you're building roads.

These roads can last for years, and they always lead back to you. The search engines find them. Surfers find them. People looking for other things find you instead.

Using www.statcounter.com, you can see where your site visitors come from, how long they stay, and what search engine terms they used to find your site. I still get hits on blog entries I wrote three years ago, by people looking for "free ebooks" "co-op money" "how to get published" and of course "Jack Daniels."

The bigger web presence you have, the more links you have coming in, the more chances people have to discover you. And they *will* discover you.

You can spend a fortune hunting mice. You can mount expeditions, buy expensive mouse hunting equipment, tour the world, and devote all of your time to tracking those little suckers down.

Or you can toss some cheese in the corner and wait.

The choice yours.

GETTING PEOPLE TO FIND YOU

1. Search engines.

I don't recommend EVER paying to be listed on a search engine, because all of the important ones will list you for free if you have correct meta tags a regularly updated site with a decent amount of information. There are plenty of services who offer to list your URL on 40,000 search engines for only $9.99. That seems like a bargain, but when was the last time you used www.maxpromo.com or www.wisenut.com to look anything up? Save your money.

2. Links.

Remember that old shampoo commercial, where the woman told two friends, and they told two friends, and so on, and so on? Links do the same thing for your website. The more people who link to you, the better off you are. The secret to attracting links is to have content that people desire. Trading links also works. Just email a fellow writer and ask to trade. Search engines love links, and the more you have going in and coming out, the higher your placement will be.

3. Newsgroups, Listservs, Yahoo Groups, Message Boards.

Or any public forum where you meet like-minded individuals band together and exchange ideas. The key to successfully establishing a presence on these forums is to contribute intelligent points in a polite and logical manner, rather than yelling *BUY MY BOOK!!!* every time you post. Your comments should always have a signature line that leads to your blog or website, but people will click on that because they want to know more about the clever person who said those smart things, not because you beg them to.

4. Paper.

I'm a firm believer that the more pieces of paper your name is on, the better you'll succeed in publishing. Because of this, I write a lot of short stories and articles, do a lot of mass mailings, and pass out a ridiculous number of coasters and business cards. Each of these lists my website URL. You should put your URL on everything. Mine is on the bumper of my car, on every ad and flyer, and even on my checks. Every piece of mail I send out gets a www.jakonrath.com rubber stamp on the back. I always mention my URL in newspaper and radio interviews, on panels, and while doing signings. Overkill? I get 1000 unique hits a day, and I'm a midlist genre writer.

5. Wikipedia.

Chances are if you Google something, www.wikipedia.org will be one of the top responses. It's an online dictionary where the entries are written by the readers. If you're a published author, have a friend do a Wiki on you (you can't do one on yourself.)

COMING UP WITH CONTENT

For sites to be visited frequently, you have to keep up a steady supply of new content. That's the reason most blogs fail, and why most author websites only get updated once a year. Coming up with new information and entertainment on a regular basis makes most writers dizzy.

But don't worry; you can work around this dilemma. If you look closely at successful sites, you'll see there are some secrets to providing regular new content.

1. Aggregate the content.

The web has become so overwhelmingly huge, you can't possibly look at everything you find interesting. Neither can anyone else. This is a good thing, because once you find something interesting, you can share it.

Providing links to interesting sites, excerpts from interesting sites, or even media from interesting sites, has become easier than ever. You can share things with your fans that you didn't have to create yourself, because it already exists on the net.

This saves you time, and can bring readers back day after day, to see what you've compiled.

2. Help from friends.

No one said your site had to be a solo effort. The multi-author blog means less individual posts for you, but higher overall traffic because each author has her own fan base. Killer Year (www.killeryear.wordpress.com) First Offenders (www.firstoffenders.typepad.com) and The Good Girls Who Kill For Money Club (www.good-girls-kill.com) are all great examples of this.

You can also interview people, which creates content. Or have guest bloggers. When a stranger is on your blog, she'll point people in your direction. Some of those people will like what they see and come back on their own.

3. Let the surfers do the work.

I set it up a new blog in a way where I don't need to devote much time to it. It's called The Anonymous Publishing Vent Club (www.ventclub.blogspot.com) where industry pros can complain about this business without naming names. The visitors are the ones who write the posts, not me. All I do is make sure the queue keeps going, which is only a minute or two of work every day.

If you host a message board or a forum, you can keep people coming back to your site with minimal effort on your part. Plus, when people have input in something, they develop a sense of ownership and community, which accounts for longer surfing times and multiple daily visits.

4. Being innovative.

Don't be afraid to try something new or different. Innovation is what spearheads Internet success, not copying what was done last week. Experiment. Get crazy. Analyze what works on you, then try to make that work for other people on your site. If it flops, you can always delete it with no residual effects. In this age of uber technology, you're only limited by your imagination. Think big.

Sample Marketing Plan

Whiskey Sour

J.A. Konrath

Goal To build a core foundation of readers, booksellers, and writers who are as enthusiastic about my work as I am, and use this group to spread word of mouth and push sales onto the best seller lists.

Genre Thriller

Sub-genre Police procedural/serial killer

Style Tense and terrifying, merged with quirky characters and laugh-out-loud dialog

Audience Buyers of mainstream fiction, suspense, thrillers, mysteries, and horror**.** I share the same readership as James Patterson, Thomas Harris, Ridley Pearson, Robert B. Parker, Lawrence Block, Robert Crais, Elmore Leonard, Ed McBain, Sue Grafton, Patrica Cornwell, and John Sandford.

***WHISKEY SOUR* is *KISS THE GIRLS* meets *GET SHORTY*.**

Author Fiction should be fun. That's why I wrote ***WHISKEY SOUR***.

I wanted to create the perfect beach book — to make the reader chuckle, cringe, and cheer... and then run out and tell their friends about it.

Publicity Strategy

1. To fully utilize the internet to recruit and mobilize my core audience. For this I'm doing the following things:

My website — www.joekonrath.com, is professionally designed and fully interactive. Visitors are treated to novel excerpts, free stories, writing tips, message boards, contests, give-aways, and information about recent sales and upcoming appearances. The site is being listed on every major search engine, and is linked to several dozen other writing and publishing sites.

My email list — Every other month I email a newsletter. The mailing list is compiled of people who have signed up for it. I currently have several hundred people on the list, and recruit many more each day.

By the time ***WHISKEY SOUR*** is published, I expect the list to number several thousand.

My connections — I belong to many newsgroups, message boards, and online organizations such as MWA and HWA, and I am constantly networking to meet new contacts, make new fans, and spread the word about my book. Even though I don't have a single thing in print yet, I'm already making a name for myself in the writing community, and I'm known by many prominent authors.

2. To meet the buyers and sellers.

Conventions — I plan to attend to following conventions: Bouchercon, World Horror Con, Horror Find Weekend, Dark and Stormy, Edgar Ceremonies, Stoker Ceremonies, Love is Murder, Malice Domestic, Sleuthfest, Magna Cum Murder, and others. I'll be speaking on panels, doing readings, signing autographs, and networking with fans and other writers.

Libraries — I'll be speaking on panels at many libraries throughout the Chicagoland area.

Schools — I'll be teaching creative writing at the College of Dupage, and visiting several classes in other schools.

Bookstores — I'm planning a car tour of twenty-five bookstores in the Midwest.

Short stories — I recently sold a short story to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine featuring my main character from ***WHISKEY SOUR***. I'll continue submitting material to anthology and magazine markets, to get my name known and gain a readership before my publication date.

3. To put my mailing list into effect.

Libraries — I've compiled a list of 5000 of the major libraries in the US. Before my pub date, I'm going to send each library a personal letter, describing who I am and detailing ***WHISKEY SOUR***.

Independent Bookstores — I've compiled a list of over 150 independent bookstores that specialize in mystery. I'd like to personally send each of them a galley of ***WHISKEY SOUR***. I worked in a bookstore for several years, and know the importance of word-of-mouth sales.

4. To utilize the media.

I'd like to work with Hyperion's publicity department and assist with press materials, securing radio and cable television interviews, and planning a limited book signing tour to the major markets.

Credo: I will continue to spend time, money, and energy on self promotion, until I make the bestseller lists.

And when that happens, I'll triple my efforts.

Sample Press Release

RUSTY NAIL

by

J.A. Konrath

Sometimes serial killers have families...

Advance praise for J.A. Konrath's *RUSTY NAIL*

Engaging characters, true guffaws, and tightly knit subplots... offering violent thrills peppered with hilarious one-liners." —*Publishers Weekly*

"Tougher than Kay Scarpetta, smarter than Stephanie Plum, Jacqueline Daniels rocks." —Alex Kava, author of *A Necessary Evil*

"Rusty Nail has it all —thrills, chills, and laugh-out-loud hilarity. JA Konrath expertly pours on both shivers and fun." —Tess Gerritsen, author of *Vanish*

"Rusty Nail goes down with the slick ease and murderous impact of the intoxicating cocktail. From finely honed characters to a plot blessed with more twists than a drunk on a bender." —Gayle Lynds, author of *The Coil*

Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels returns for another bold and exciting shot of action in **RUSTY NAIL (Hyperion; July 5, 2006; $23.95; Hardcover).** Still recovering from the horrors of last year's **BLOODY MARY**, Jack once again finds herself hip-deep in murder. Someone is sending Chicago's top cop snuff videos. The victims share a common thread—they each were involved in one of Jack's previous cases. A year ago, Jack brought the serial slayer known as The Gingerbread Man to justice. Is it possible he's back? Or is this a copycat killer with an even more perverse agenda?

Everyone Jack knows and cares about is soon a target. Her binge-eating partner. Her ailing mother. Her sleazy ex-partner. Her long suffering boyfriend. As the body count rises, and Jack juggles personal life with professional life, she walks right into the most terrifying family reunion in the annals of crime—and these blood relatives have some deadly plans for the woman who took away their kin...

Konrath's trademark combination of biting wit and nail-biting suspense make **RUSTY NAIL** a delightful cross between the best of James Patterson and Janet Evanovich. Once again, Jack Daniels delivers a double shot of laughs and scares in what is easily her most outrageous, and intense, adventure yet.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: J.A. Konrath's previous novels, *Whiskey Sour* and *Bloody Mary*, have been finalists for the Macavity, Gumshoe, and Anthony Awards. J.A. has written for cable TV, performed improv comedy, and designed award-winning websites. He lives in the Chicago suburbs.

RUSTY NAIL

By J.A. Konrath

Published by Hyperion

July 5, 2006

Price: $23.95; Hardcover

ISBN # 1-4013-0088-X

For interview requests with J.A. Konrath, please contact

Charlie Davidson, Associate Publicist at 212-456-0172

or by email at charlie.davidson@abc.com

To obtain a review copy, please email your request or fax it to 212-456-0176

This essay was included in my ARCs of Whiskey Sour, and also included in Press Releases sent to select media folks and booksellers.

Biography Information Press Release

JA Konrath

author of

WHISKEY SOUR and BLOODY MARY

I was recently mistaken for being a woman.

I took it as a compliment.

Many people who read my novel *Whiskey Sour* assume the author must be female. After all, the hero is a cop named Jacqueline Daniels, and it's written in first-person perspective, i.e.: "I tugged out my .38 and adjusted my underwire, which was digging into my ribs."

The name on the cover says "JA," and everyone knows that when two initials are used, the author is really a woman. Right?

Wrong.

I'm a card carrying member of the Y-chromosome. I brew my own beer, I like to watch boxing, and I don't own anything Fendi.

So what am I doing writing chick-lit mysteries? Do I have some deep, Freudian issues that I'm working out? Was I forced to mainline estrogen to appease an unscrupulous publisher? Do I have a fetish for Minolo Blahniks?

The answers are no, no, and no —though if Minolo ever made a loafer in a Men's Size 9.5 W, I'd give it a shot.

To understand why I write for a woman, we first need to look at the woman.

Jack Daniels is a Lieutenant in Chicago's Violent Crimes Division. She's forty-six, divorced, dyes her hair when the roots start to show, and hates wearing nylons on humid days. Jack is tough, honest, and an over-achiever; she has to be to succeed in a male dominated profession in the Murder Capitol of America. She has trouble in her relationships, because the Job always comes first, and she suffers from insomnia, which causes her to blow a lot of money on infomercial products at 3AM.

As for me, I'm thirty-four, married, and I embrace the gray in my hair—I'm happy to even *have* hair. While Jack studied Poly Sci in college, I opted for Television. Both majors left us totally unprepared for the job market, though Jack's desire to right wrongs is more altruistic than my desire to write novels. I'm also tough, honest, and an over-achiever; I have to be to succeed in the female dominated profession of Big City Publishing.

I wrote my first novel in 1992. You might remember it, if you're my mother. It wasn't published. Neither were my second, third, or fourth through ninth books. I racked up over 480 rejections, wrote over a million words, and didn't sell a single verb. If there were an award for the World's Biggest Loser, I wouldn't even win that.

So when it came time for the tenth book, I took a long, hard look at myself, the publishing world, and where I fit in, and I discovered a wonderful irony. When I was growing up, publishing was, for the most part, a man's profession. Men were the editors. Men were the agents. Men wrote the novels.

The opposite is true today. My agent, and her partner, are women. My editor, her boss, her assistant, my copy editor, my marketing director, my publicist—all women. And why not? Mystery fiction is dominated by women authors, and mystery books are bought primarily by women (as much as 80%, I've read).

Creating Jack for my tenth novel was no brainer. It disturbs my wife somewhat; she gets weirded-out reading love scenes that her husband has written from a female POV.

My mom, who always wanted a daughter, thinks it's hilarious.

And me? I love it. Jack is both challenging, and liberating, to write for. She's got an emotional range that is so much wider than all of the male protagonists I'd created in the past. She pushes me to my creative limits and forces me to think outside the box.

I chose to go by my initials "JA" rather than my masculine first name, because I'm honored to follow in the footsteps of wonderful writers like PD James, JD Robb, JA Jance—women one and all.

And if an occasional reader mistakes me for a woman, I couldn't ask for higher praise.

It's about time things came full circle, don't you think?

Sample Author Questionaire

HYPERION AUTHOR QUESTIONAIRE

DATE: 1/21/2005

TITLE OF NEW BOOK:

Bloody Mary: A Lt. Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels Mystery.

NAME:

Mr. JA Konrath

Date of Birth:

03/29/70

Place of Birth:

Chicago

Citizenship:

US

Marital Status:

Let me ask my wife Maria… she was angry at me earlier.

Number of Children:

Three, that I know of.

Email Address:

haknort@comcast.net

Do you have a website?

www.JAKonrath.com

www.jakonrath.blogspot.com

www.myspace.com/jakonrath

Colleges attended/Degrees earned (please include dates):

Graduated Columbia College in Chicago in 1992 with a Bachelor's in English. I also did a lot of TV and Film work, and wrote, directed, and starred in many local cable access productions.

Are you a full time writer? If not, please state your occupation.

Full time! I also teach fiction writing at the College of Dupage in Glen Ellyn, IL (www.cod.edu).

Please list any other books you have written:

Whiskey Sour: A Lt. Jack Daniels Thriller —-1st book in the Jacquline Daniels series, Hyperion 2004 in hardcover, Hyperion 2005 in mass market paperback

Are you a regular contributor to any magazines or newspapers?

I've been published in Writer's Digest Magazine, Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, and in two dozen other magazines and anthologies since 2004.

Please write a brief biographical sketch:

Bio attached

How long have you been at work on this book?

I write a book a year.

What are your hometown newspapers?

Chicago Sun Times, Chicago Tribune, The Dailey Herald.

Please briefly describe your new book.

BLOODY MARY combines the laughs of Janet Evanovich or Dave Barry with the scares of James Patterson or Thomas Harris. It's the second in the highly-acclaimed thriller series featuring Chicago Violent Crimes Lieutenant Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels.

Join Jack as she struggles to repair her train wreck of a personal life, while tracking down and convicting one of the scariest serial killers in recent memory —-a killer for whom getting caught is only the beginning…

What is your favorite bookstore?

I love indie bookstores, and have also had success selling hundreds of copies of Whiskey Sour through the Waldenbooks chain.

How did the idea for this book originate?

I write books that make people laugh, then scare them so badly they turn on all the lights and lock their doors.

Did the book involve any special research?

Besides the normal cop and crime scene research, BLOODY MARY is part legal thriller, and I had to really learn a lot about murder trials to make the courtroom scenes ring true.

If fiction, please list any school of writing that has influenced you:

I'm the world's biggest mystery fan, with a collection of over 5000 books.

What points do you think should be emphasized in the promotion of your book?

ADVANCE PRAISE FOR BLOODY MARY:

"As sharp and tangy as its title cocktail. Snappy dialogue. Powerful action. A fabulous character to spend time with. What a recipe for a page-turner." - David Morrell, bestselling author of The Brotherhood of the Rose.

"Characters you care about and a breath-stealing plot. Reading BLOODY MARY is a ride on a rocket-propelled roller coaster. Strap in and hold on tight." - Jack Kerley, author of The Hundredth Man.

"Raise a glass to Joe Konrath. BLOODY MARY is bloody good. Jack Daniels has heart, smarts, and all of Chicago to detect in." - Barbara D'Amato, author of Death of a Thousand Cuts.

"Take one large psychopath, mix with an unusually violent cat, add a fast pace, a lean plot, and Jack Daniels and what do you get? Believe it or not, a Bloody Mary." - Bill Fitzhugh, author of Radio Activity.

"A healthy shot of colorful characters, dizzying dialogue and a potent plot, BLOODY MARY is laugh-out-loud funny... even when read sober." - PJ Parrish, bestselling author of A Killing Rain.

"I haven't actually read this book, but I can say that J.A. Konrath is an entertaining writer, based on the 53 emails he sent hounding me to write this blurb." – bestselling author Dave Barry

PROMOTION FOR WHISKEY SOUR:

- **Since May 2004, I've signed books at 144 bookstores in Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, New York, and New Jersey.**
- **I've handsold approximately 1200 copies of Whiskey Sour by meeting people in bookstores who have never heard of me and approaching them —the number would be higher if the stores I visited had more copies.**
- **I've appeared on panels at over a dozen writing conferences, including Bouchercon, Love is Murder, Dark and Stormy, Printer's Row, BEA, World Horror Con, Horrorfind, Men of Mystery, Magna Cum Murder, Sleuthfest, Left Coast Crime, and the Midwest Literary Festival.**
- **I've done readings at eighteen libraries since May.**
- **My website, www.JAKonrath.com, has received over 25,000 hits since July 2004.**
- **My email newsletter goes out three times a year to 11,000 recipients.**
- **I've sold short stories and articles to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, Writer's Digest, and sixteen other magazines and anthologies in the past 12 months. Queen and Hitchcock each have a circulation of 250,000.**
- **I've handed out and mailed over 1200 free short story chapbooks featuring characters from the Jack Daniels series, which include links to my website and info about Whiskey Sour. Unlike booksmarks, postcards, business cards, and flyers, chapbooks aren't thrown away by fans, who love to collect them.**
- **I've mailed signed bookplates to 350 bookstores.**
- **I'm up for two Anthony Awards and the Robert L. Fish Award.**
- **I've been a Booksense Pick, and an Independent Mystery Bookseller Association bestseller twice.**
- **I'm an active member in more than a dozen online newsgroups and listservs.**
- **I've gotten 25 reviews through my contacts in the mystery community, including the following:**

"I found myself laughing out loud many times. The second book in the series can't come soon enough!" - Murder Express

"I couldn't put it down! It's great!" - The Best Reviews

"Lightening fast action, chilling suspense, and biting humor." - Book Reporter

"So well written, it is hard to believe this is a first novel." - BookBitch

"Pithy banter... it's like a Monty Python rendition of a crime novel." - The Courier

"A gripping, fast-paced, and funny read." - Books'n'Bytes

"What a fabulous book!" - Mystery Morgue

"Whiskey Sour is a real page-turner... (Jack Daniels) had me laughing out loud."- BookLoons

"Fast action, involving characters, twists galore. Easily one of the best debut suspense novels in recent years. Bring on the sequel!" - BookPage

"A first class, totally absorbing crime thriller." - Midwest Book Review

"Highly recommended... a great first outing." - New Mystery Reader

"Four stars... tough, funny, and smart." - Deadly Pleasures

"Sharp dialog and dry wit... it has all the polish of any suspense thriller bestseller." - Murder and Mayhem Bookclub

"Whiskey Sour is very good indeed." - January Magazine

"If you want a wonderful, funny, believable, well-researched murder mystery/thriller, look no further." - Rendezvous Magazine

"Suspense skillfully balanced with brilliant humor... powerful and exciting." - MyShelf

"This book lives up to its hype." - Reviewing the Evidence

"A brilliant debut..." - Chizine

"Extremely rich in both character and tension." - MostlyFiction

"Add this one to your reading list... you will not be sorry!" – Bestsellers World

"Whiskey Sour is an amazing book." - I Love A Mystery Newsletter

"A wonderful novel mixing the best elements of what the genre has to offer" - Readers Room

"An exciting book, with a teasing sort of style that draws you in." - Pahrump Valley Times

"An easy, breezy read, well written and very funny." - Kingston Observer

"Readers who are familiar with Stephanie Plum will feel right at home" - Mystery Reader

"Konrath displays genuine talent." - Mystery Scene

"Whiskey Sour is a combination of Jilliane Hoffman's RETRIBUTION edginess with an Evanovich sense of humor. You gotta love it." – Tulsa World

"An original, humorous character study of a woman on the edge of her career and personal life. Whiskey Sour moves at a brisk pace to a surprising and tense finale that has quite a kick." – South Florida Sun-Sentinel

"Everything about Whiskey Sour is smart - smart characters, smart writing, and a smart pace that keeps you reading long after you'd meant to turn out the lights. J.A. Konrath makes you care about his quirky, frazzled heroine, Lt. Jack Daniels, both on and off the job. This superb debut goes down smooth and will leave readers demanding a refill!"–Michael Prescott, bestselling author of Comes the Dark and Stealing Faces

"A dash of sardonic wit, two jiggers of the colorful Jack Daniels (the novel's main character), and the icy, sharpened prose of J.A. Konrath, all combine to make Whiskey Sour a literary cocktail that'll knock you off your chair."–Ridley Pearson, bestselling author of the Lou Boldt series

Even us non-drinkers wil enjoy Joe Konrath's detective story, with its witty dialogue and enjoyable characters. With an intriguing female as his protagonist, Joe gives us our first glimpse of a promising series. —Steve Alten, bestselling author of the Meg series

"Whiskey Sour introduces J.A. Konrath, a fresh, fierce and frightening new voice, and a delightful heroine in Jack Daniels, who is as funny and resilient as she is feisty and determined."–David Wiltse , author of the John Becker series

"Whiskey Sour is a stunning debut novel. Konrath has brewed up a compulsive page- turner populated by real people, a heroine to empathize with and root for, and a monstrous villain serving up enough red meat to satisfy the hungriest Hannibal Lecter fan."–George C. Chesbro, author of the Mongo series

"Aged in the oak barrel of a ferocious imagination, this amazing debut is a bracing splash of hard-core sour mash suspense! I gulped Whiskey Sour down in one scalding binge–so entertaining I couldn't stop, yet so brutal and visceral I felt like cringing at the aftertaste. Put Donald Westlake in a blender with a jigger of James Ellroy, mix in a dollop of Dorothy Parker, and you've got the hilarious, horrific world of Lieutenant Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels. I can't wait until the next fix!"–Jay Bonansigna, author of Sleep Police and Oblivion

"Whiskey Sour is one potent cocktail: a police procedural dashed with romance, mixed with a shot of sharp-tongued commentary, and garnished with a acidic sprinkling of spoof. Put me down for another round of Lieutenant Jack Daniels." –Andrew Vachss, bestselling author of the Burke series

"Finally – a heroine for the rest of us! Funny, feisty, and gutsy, Jack Daniels is a delightful addition to the pantheon of female detectives. By turns hilarious and horrific, Whiskey Sour is a compulsively readable mystery. I couldn't put it down! J.A. Konrath is a writer to watch!"–Libby Fischer Hellmann, author of the Ellie Foreman series

"Whiskey Sour: take the grim doings of a vicious psychopath, stir in quirky characters and crisp dialogue, then shake with dollops of laugh-aloud humor. A fast, fun read. I'm looking forward to the next Jack Daniels outing." — F. Paul Wilson, bestselling author of the Repairman Jack series

"Whiskey Sour is one hell of a ride! J.A. Konrath expertly pits a tough, smart, and highly likeable homicide detective against an almost unimaginably evil serial killer, moving story along briskly as one part cat-and-mouse game, one part chess match. As the story hurtles along, you'll be shaken and stirred, with no choice but to keep turning pages to see how it all plays out. You'll never think of razor blades and 7-11's the same way again–but the gritty streets of Chicago are a better and safer (and more fun) place with J.A. Konrath and his Lt. Jacqueline Daniels on the job. I look forward to reading more stories about her."–Rob Kantner, author of the Ben Perkins series

"Whiskey Sour is detective fiction at its finest. It's filled with jackknife plot turns, edge of the blade suspense, and razor-sharp, laugh-out-loud wit. J. A. Konrath has created something special here–a new series character I'll follow with the same devotion I read Spenser and Dave Robicheaux." –Rick Hautala, bestselling author of Bedbugs and The Mountain King

"J.A. Konrath's Whiskey Sour is the best mystery series debut I've read in years. From electric excitement to laugh-out-loud humor, this book has it all–and to boot it has Chicago Lt. Jacqueline (Jack) Daniels, who's one of the most delightful, beautifully-drawn characters to happen on the detective scene in a very long time. This may be J.A. Konrath's first mystery, but no one who reads it will ever believe that; his touch is sure and expert. What a crackling tale this is. I can't wait for the next installment."–Warren B. Murphy, author of the Trace series

"Without question, you have to meet Konrath's characters and the dynamo of his narrative to believe anyone can call out and sink every shot with such verve and confidence–but Whiskey Sour is on game from page one to the last. I can honestly say that I have seen the future of suspense thrillers, and it is J.A. Konrath..."–Robert W. Walker, author of the Instinct and Edge series

"Thriller lovers rejoice. Whiskey Sour marks a stunning debut for J.A. Konrath. Smooth as aged bourbon, with plenty of sting, the novel races into your bloodstream and takes your head and heart on a wild ride. A monstrous villain tangles with a determined cop–what more could any reader ask? You'll admire Lieutenant Jack Daniels' sharp mind and sly wit, but her warmth and humanity are what make Whiskey Sour such a pleasure to read. The prose is so polished, so assured, you'll feel you are reading the tenth

novel by a master pro at the peak of his powers. I can't wait for the next one."– Steven Spruill, author of Sleeper and My Soul to Take

"Being a police officer and an occasionally drinker of whiskey myself, Whiskey Sour immediately caught my eye —especially with a main character with the name "Lt. Jack Daniels". I am a big fan of Ed McBain (87th Precinct) and Roberts B. Parker (Spenser novels) —so finding a book that combines both their styles was a real treat. Whiskey Sour is fast, fun, and witty, with humor and just the right amount of gore to keep me turning the page. From what I understand this is Konrath's first novel, but hopefully not the last!" —Colin Sullivan, Texas-based police officer

"J.A. Konrath's touch is so deft that it's amazing to think that Whiskey Sour is only his first novel. This is a fast, funny, furiously entertaining debut, and I hope J.A. plans on keeping his smart, sardonic, and, at 45, sexy-as-hell heroine around for a long, long time. Damn it, I want Jack! There, I said it." – Barry Eisler, author of the John Rain series

"Whiskey Sour captures the feel and flavor of what it's really like on the streets chasing violent offenders. Konrath's characters are tough, gritty and flawed just enough to make them real. I can't wait for the next sip of Jack Daniels." —Sergeant Dave Putnam, San Bernadino County Sheriff's Department.

"Suspense thrillers are often compared to rollercoasters and this one's the Big Kahuna. There's that first wild, breathtaking drop and then the excitement never lets up until you roll into the last page." —Raymond Benson, bestselling author of the James Bond series

"Jack Daniels is the best new face on the cop scene in years! Whiskey Sour is an intoxicating blend of pulse-pounding thrills, side-splitting humor and a serial killer who will haunt your dreams." – David Ellis, author of In the Company of Liars

"Upon finishing Whiskey Sour, I immediately wanted more; I guess I'm just hooked on Lt. Jack Daniels, the freshest new cop on the beat. Konrath is Hiaasen with teeth, Elmore Leonard by way of a dark alley. By turns horrifying and hilarious, Whiskey Sour is one sweet read."—Eric Garcia, bestselling author of Matchstick Men and Hot and Sweaty Rex

"If you like your mystery fresh and your heroine even fresher, don't miss Whiskey Sour. A detective for the new millennium: sharply witty, deftly wry, and unabashedly clever." – James Rollins, bestselling author of Sandstorm

Quickie Promo Tips

You worked your butt off writing the book, and worked even harder finding a publisher.

But now the REAL work begins.

There will be close to 200,000 books published this year. Only one out of five will make money.

You want to be that one. But the odds say you won't be. I know dozens of published authors who can't get another contact because of poor prior sales. They all have the same, dazed look in their eyes, wondering what happened. Some blame their publisher. Some blame their agent. Some blame fate.

But have any of them blamed themselves?

When you write a book, it's your name on the cover. You should be the one who dictates its success or failure.

It's your book. It's your job to sell it.

Here are some marketing and self promotional tips that will help:

CREATE A WEBSITE

Every author needs a home page. It's a 24 hour advertisement for your book. But the best web pages, the ones that keep people coming back, are more than just ads. They focus on what they have to offer, rather than what they have to sell.

You'll need three things to get started:

1. A domain name, which you can buy at domain name registrars like namesdirect.com, godaddy.com, and allwhois.com.

2. A domain host. Many of the above also offer hosting services. Some ISPs also have free hosting, and authorsguild.com has a good deal for pros.

3. A web design program like Frontpage or Dreamweaver, or a web designer.

Good websites are easy to navigate, pleasant to view, and consistent on different browsers and at different screen resolutions. But the most important aspect of any site is content.

Naturally, you'll need info about you and your writing. But to make your site sticky (as in, people stick around for a while), there are many other things you can add:

- Offer free stuff. Stories, excerpts, writing tips, downloads, etc. Update these often, to keep people coming back.
- Hold a contest.
- Host a message board.
- Start a blog.

- Add content on a weekly basis. Even if it's just a new tip or a new appearance. Change is what brings people back.
- Sell stuff.
- Have a links page, and reciprocate with peers.
- Don't link to Amazon or BN.com. Indie bookstores hate that, and many will hold it against you. I'd suggest linking to www.booksense.com instead.
- Offer press materials on your site. A downloadable press release, pic, bio, background, etc.
- Have a newsletter folks can sign up for.
- List reviews and blurbs.

Once you have a site, make yourself a presence on the internet. Join newsgroups, chat rooms, other author's message boards. Join writing organizations (SFWA, ITW, HWA, MWA, RWA, etc). Add your website to your email signature.

DON'T pay for advertising. How often do you click on banners? Neither does anyone else. Pay-per-click search engines and web-rings are a waste of time in my opinion.

Pass out business cards with your website on it to everyone. I include cards in all mail I send out (letters, bills, payments). I pass them out to people I meet. I have my URL on every piece of promo material I hand out (flyers, event announcements, etc).

CONVENTIONS

Conventions can be expensive, but they are immeasurably valuable in getting your name out there, and if you're savvy, and use them wisely, they can be the biggest bang for your promotional buck.

Here's what I do:

1. Pick the conventions that you'll benefit from most. As a mystery author, Bouchercon is essential for me. Malice Domestic, while a fun mystery conference, caters mostly to cozy writers, and I write thrillers, so I don't attend that one. You have to be choosy.

2. Register in advance. This will assure you get on a speaking panel, and that you pay the lowest price (most cons have early bird pricing specials). It will also make the hotel fee and plane fare less of a burden if the registration has been paid for months earlier. Most convention costs are between $50 and $175 (for the three day conventions). If money is tight, save in advance. Have a jar that you put extra change in. Give up smoking or gum or dessert, and put the money you would have spent on that towards a convention. Try to get your publisher to go halvsies with you.

3. Priceline.com and Expedia. Hotels usually offer discounts for convention-goers, but you can almost always get a better deal by using Priceline or Expedia. Priceline lets you name your own price. I recently stayed in Muncie for Magna Cum Murder for $30 a night, when everyone else was paying $95.

It also isn't necessary to stay at the hotel the convention is being held at. It's convenient, but if you can save major money by staying at a nearby hotel, do it. At Bouchercon I didn't stay at either of the convention hotels

($220 a night). I stayed a mile away ($50 a night), and also had a roommate to split the costs (so it came out to $25 a night). Often the person running the convention can put out the word that you're looking for a roommate.

Airfare can also vary dramatically. Join the internet discount programs for all the major airlines (they send you weekly internet fare specials). I just flew from Chicago to NY for $49 each way.

4. Pack food and alcohol. Restaurants and bars are a great place to meet and schmooze, but you don't need to eat and drink there. Packing a sandwich can save you a $20 lunch. Packing a bottle of rum or a case of beer will cost less than if you spend the night drinking in the bar, and then you can invite people up to drink in your room, which will make you very popular.

I can't stress enough how much meeting and greeting is done at conventions. And if you tell a group of authors/fans/convention goers that "I've got a case of beer on ice in my room", people will follow you, and love you for it.

5. Make the convention count. Pass out business cards to everyone. EVERYONE. Bring flyers for the goodie table. Bring hand-outs. Make sure you know the bookseller beforehand, and that they have your book. Bring extra copies of your book, just in case. Get the extra copies from a local bookseller, rather than from your publisher, because then they count towards your sales. A local indie store who likes you will order copies and sell them to you at cost —a 40% discount off cover price.

6. NEVER sell your own book unless the bookseller is out of stock. And if they are out of stock, offer to give the bookseller copies on consignment —-assuming you got them at discount —- and pass the same discount off to the seller. You DO NOT want to make money selling books yourself. You want the bookseller to make money, so they like you and keep ordering your books and handselling them.

7. Carry a copy of your book around with you at the con. Hand it to people to look at. Try to meet as many people as you can —that means sitting down with strangers at lunchtime, joining conversations when you don't know anyone there, speaking to authors you've never met or even heard of, and smiling the whole time.

A successful convention won't just boost your sales, it will boost your word-of-mouth. People will talk about you afterwards. You'll be discussed in bookstores, in libraries, and on newsgroups.

If you prepare for your panels and are engaging, informative, and funny, that is the best advertising you can ever have. If you meet people and seem genuinely interested in talking to them, you'll be remembered.

You must be part entertainer, part salesperson, and part ambassador at a convention. If you plan carefully, a convention can be the best thing you do for your career.

And plan on taking a day or two off after the convention ends —-you'll be exhausted.

LEARN TO SPEAK IN PUBLIC

There's no greater fear than public speaking. Introducing yourself to a stanger is tough. Introducing yourself to a room full of strangers is terrifying. It takes guts, confidence, fearlessness, and a willingness to keep trying, even in the face of rejection.

Sort of like what it takes to get published.

Writers are public figures —even the terminally shy ones. There are wallflowers who never do signings, or never speak at libraries, or never go to conferences. And some of them sell a lot of books. But they aren't selling as many as they could.

Though I wouldn't suggest anyone do anything outside of their comfort zone, with education and encouragement comfort zones can change.

Getting a rejection in the mail is tough. Sitting at a table and having no one buy your book is a lot harder. Trust me on this. It's degrading, humiliating, and makes you feel worthless. Take all the self-doubt, depression, and dashed hopes of every rejection you've ever had, and multiply them by ten. That's how it feels, being ignored by patrons in a bookstore.

If you worked your butt off to get published, you might consider the next step.

Join a local Toastmasters. Take a public speaking course at a local community college. Take a part time job waiting tables.

All of these are options open to you. And believe me, getting through a public speaking course is much easier than selling a book. ANYONE can learn to speak in public. Not everyone can get published.

When you dreamt of becoming a writer, you had no limits. Why impose limits now?

Libraries are always happy to host author events. Some of them even pay. Call the libraries in your area, ask to speak to the Events Coordinator, and try to set something up.

Network with published friends —-libraries often like a group of writers rather than just one. You can speak about how to get published (always popular) or do a reading and answer questions about your book.

Go to **WWW.PUBLICLIBRARIES.ORG** for a list of every library in the US, listed by state and county. And to see if they already carry your book, visit **http://www.oclc.org/worldcatdownloads/#top** which lets you download a toolbar that gives you access the the databases of US libraries.

PROMO ITEMS

How many times have you bought a book that you learned about from a promotional bookmark?

I've gone to dozen of conferences, and have picked up over a hundred bookmarks. I've never bought a book because of a bookmark.

A bookmark will not persuade someone to buy a book. It could possibly alert fans who already might buy the book, or be a subtle reminder, reinforcing your name and your novel in someone's mind. But there are better give-away items for that.

A flyer is cheaper, bigger (so you can fit more info on it), and will also alert potential buyers. Or your business card can have all that info, and people tend to keep businnes cards (at least I do).

When deciding upon advertising or promotional material, you should figure out what convinces YOU to buy things, then do that. What promotional item makes you plunk down $8, or $15, or $24 for a book? Here's my list:

- I've never bought a book because I received a bookmark, a postcard, a pen, or a novelty item.
- I've never bought a book because I saw an ad.
- I've never gone to see an unknown author at a booksigning.
- I have bought a book because I've liked previous books by the author.
- I have bought a book because I like the subject matter.
- I have bought a book because I met the author and liked her.
- I have bought a book because someone recommended it.
- I have looked at a book based on its cover, and looked closer if the cover has blurbs and reviews, but even then it's the WRITING that sells the book to me, not the praise of Clive Cussler or People Magazine.

The old axiom in advertising, about having products stick in your head after repeated exposure to them, only works if THE PRODUCT IS SOMETHING YOU'D BUY ANYWAY.

Author branding is a good thing. Having name recognition will help you in the long run, and the more you get your name out there, in any way you can, the better it will be for you. Recognition might be the little nudge that gets a buyer to pick up your book in the bookstore.

But it won't get the buyer to buy it. And it isn't the give-away doodad that will encourage word of mouth. It's the writing.

So before you spend big money on promo items, think long and hard. What makes you buy books?

I make chapbooks.

CHAPBOOKS

A chapbook is a writing sample in booklet form, staple bound with a cardstock cover. In my experience, a free, limited edition chapbook (which you can print up for about 9 cents each, by buying paper and cardstock in bulk and refilling your own inkjet carts) is a much better bang for your marketing buck.

This could be comprised of a short story or two, or the first chapter of your novel. This gives people a taste of your writing, gives them something they'll keep (a signed, limited, numbered edition is collectible, and a lot of book buyers are collectors), and also serves as an advertisement for your book (website URL, blurbs, reviews, excepts, bio).

I've done seven different chapbooks, and printed 200 copies of each.

The first chapbook I ever made was for a short story featuring the lead character from my novel, Whiskey Sour. The story was about 4000 words, and fit onto 16 chapbook pages.

Here's how it works. You write a story using for favorite word processor. Then you change the paper size (in the WP program) from 8.5 x 11 to 11 X 8.5. So instead of the pages being eleven inches long, they are now eleven inches wide.

Then divide the entire story into two columns, using the word processor. So each full page will have two pages printed on the front, and two pages printed on the back. (take apart any staple-bound magazine and it will have four pages printed on each piece of paper).

When you print the chapbook, use the command to print it as a booklet. Your printer will automatically print it in order, so when it's folded and stapled, the pages all look like a real book. This requires feeding in each sheet twice.

So my 16 page book was actually four paper pages, folded in half and with printing on both sides. Plus a cardstock cover. The front cover looked like a book cover. The inside had the copyright info. The margins were all justified, and I adjusted font size until the text took up all 16 pages (you have to think in multiples of four, because anything less will give you blank pages at the end).

The inside back cover had an author photo and bio. The back cover was a blurb for the short story, plus info about WHISKEY SOUR and my website.

The second chapbook I printed had an excerpt from WHISKEY SOUR, plus a short story.

The third had a short story that tied into WHISKEY SOUR.

The fourth had some horror short stories that I gave out at a horror convention (a different crowd than the mystery crowd. I played up the serial killer angle of WHISKEY SOUR, rather than the mystery angle.)

The fifth was a reprint of #2.

The sixth and seventh were a new mystery short story that tied into WHISKEY SOUR, and a new horror short story that tied into WHISKEY SOUR.

All had my bio, website info, and facts about my novel on the back and inside covers.

Because it's basically a mini-book, people keep them. They store on the shelf next to regular books. I also put a cover price of $2.50 on the booklet. At events, I NEVER sell the booklet, but the cover price makes it look a little more professional, and there's a perceived value to something that has a price on it.

With chapbooks, people don't feel like they're being marketed to —they feel like they're getting a gift.

Promotion: A Biased Account of Cost vs. Benefit

I had a long chat recently with a friend of mine who shall remain nameless (check out his highly acclaimed John Rain series.)

This friend is extremely savvy when it comes to promotion, and one of his methods is to analyze cost vs. benefit.

Cost can be measured monetarily, or measured by the amount of time something takes, because time=money.

Benefit can be the tangible immediate return on investment (book sales) or an intangible, longer-term benefit, such as building name-recognition, brand awareness, or contacts for use further down the road.

Before marketing, advertising, promoting, or doing any publicity, the writer should figure out if their efforts are truly worth the time and money involved.

This is a sound philosophy. When combined with my personal philosophy of "don't do what doesn't work for you" it turns into a savvy marketing and publicity plan that can be tailored to any writer's budget and availability.

Remember that one of the keys of building name recognition is word-of-mouth. People talking about you is more important than any single thing you or your publisher can do. When promoting, one of your goals should be to encourage world of mouth.

Also remember that momentum is important. After any sort of publicity, promotion, marketing, or advertising, the chance of a sale diminishes as time passes. Out of sight, out of mind. The best promotion has immediate effects; usually a sale.

Here are a few things many writers do, with my comments. Your mileage may vary.

Placing Ads in Newspapers, Magazines, Programs
Monetary Cost: Ranges from free to $50,000 for full page NYT ad.
Time Cost: Variable, depending on if you're creating your own ad.
Benefits: Intangible. No one in the multi-billion advertising world can say for sure that ads work. They do reinforce brand awareness, and announce the arrival of new products. But unless the brand is already established, their effect on consumers is negligible.
Word of Mouth Potential: Small.
Momentum: Small. Going from reading an ad to rushing to a bookstore is unheard of.
Does it work for JA? I have never bought a book after seeing an ad. Because of this, I don't normally buy ads. But if my publisher pays for them, or if I get a good deal from a niche mystery magazine like **Crimespree**, then the benefits outweigh the cost. I'd personally never pay more than $200 for an ad.
How much to spend: 5% of your promotional budget, 2% of your time.

Going to Writing Conventions and Conferences
Monetary Cost: Ranges from free to $1500 for overseas travel

Time Cost: High. Travel is the second most time-consuming promotion.
Benefits: Intangible and tangible. Networking is important, and meeting fans is essential. If you do well on a panel, you'll sell some books, but you'll **never** sell enough to cover the expense of the trip. Depending on your marquee value, you may be invited to attend for free, or may even get paid.
Word of Mouth Potential: Medium to high, depending on how hard you push yourself.
Momentum: High. Do well on a panel, you'll have a line of people buying books.
Does it work for JA? I attend a lot of conferences, and whenever I do, a group of authors wind up at the bar openly wondering if it is worthwhile to attend a lot of conferences. The consensus: You should attend *some.* You can learn a lot, and help build a brand, and meet many key people. But if you're going to 15 cons a year, at $500 each, you might want to spend some of that time and money elsewhere.
How much to spend: 35% of your promotional budget, 25% of your time.

Bookmarks/Flyers/Give-Always
Monetary Cost: Ranges from a penny each up to $20 for T-shirts.
Time Cost: Small to medium, depending on how much of the printing you do yourself.
Benefits: Having something to hand out to audience members during a talk is essential. So is having something on the goody table at cons. These reinforce the brand, but they don't make people rush out in a buying frenzy.
Word of Mouth Potential: Small.
Momentum: Medium. I've seen many people in the dealer room at conferences, holding my coaster or flyer, and buying my book.
Does it work for JA? I give away chapbooks that I make myself (about ten cents each), signed coasters, and occasional flyers. None of these lead directly to sales, but they supplement my appearances by showing customers and fans my book jackets, blurbs, or writing samples. Many fans also keep them.
How much to spend: 5% of your promotional budget, 5% of your time.

Postcards and Letters
Monetary Cost: Between 35 and 85 cents each to print and send.
Time Cost: Small to medium, depending on how much of the printing and mailing you do yourself.
Benefits: Reinforces brand, alerts customers to new book, sometimes gives author appearance information.
Word of Mouth Potential: None to medium.
Momentum: Medium. A letter can make a librarian or bookseller pick up the phone and order a few copies.
Does it work for JA? I've never bought a book because I received a postcard, so I never send postcards. In fact, I'm frankly staggered at what a bad idea it is sending postcards out. A slick postcard costs 60 cents to print and mail. An author gets 55 cents royalty on a paperback sale. Even if I do buy their book (and I don't) they're still losing money. Why would anyone think this is effective?
But... I *do* send letters to libraries and bookstores. They're inundated with postcards, but a personally signed note is always welcome, and can lead to sales. Sending to sellers rather than individual customers means your small investment can pay off in large numbers.
How much to spend: 10% of your promotional budget, 10% of your time.

Website and Blog
Monetary Cost: Free to $3000 set-up cost, then about $100 a year.
Time Cost: Small to medium.
Benefits: You must have a website. The bigger, the better. I've gone into this on previous blogs, and on **JAKonrath.com**. Basically you want a lot of info, a lot of links, and a lot to make it sticky.
Word of Mouth Potential: Medium to High. Being a successful blogger has little direct effect on book sales, but becoming well known is key to branding.
Momentum: Medium. The Internet allows for clicking directly to sales via Amazon and other online retailers. I sell a good number of books this way.
Does it work for JA? Yes. I get lots of hits, lots of feedback, and lots of new fans because of my website and blog. After initial set-up costs, maintenance and updating is minimal in both time and money.
How much to spend: After initial start up costs, 5% of your budget. 10% of your time. If you can be your own webmaster, it will save you a lot of money, but you'll need to invest more time.

Speaking Events (Libraries, Colleges, Book Clubs, Writing Groups)
Monetary Cost: Free or you get paid.
Time Cost: Medium. This is usually an all day time expenditure. Possibly two days if travel is involved.
Benefits: It's important to do these, but it may be a loss leader if you spend three hours on the road to speak to a crowd of four people. Often these events are very good for selling books, and many times you get paid to speak, or compensated for travel expenses.
Word of Mouth Potential: Medium to high, depending on size of audience.
Momentum: Medium to high, depending on how good a speaker you are.
Does it work for JA? Yes. I believe that fans I meet in person are fans for life. I do as many as my schedule allows.
How much to spend: 5% of your budget (for travel.) 15% of your time.

Book Signings and Drive-Bys
Monetary Cost: Medium to high, if you finance your own tour.
Time Cost: Medium to high, depending on how many stories you visit.
Benefits: Meeting the booksellers is one of the most important things you can do in your career. They can handsell your books. They can put you in key display spots without coop. They can keep your books in stock even though they've been told to return them. Meet and schmooze the booksellers.
Word of Mouth potential: Medium to high, depending on how good of an impression you make on the bookseller.
Momentum: Medium to high. Sometimes a bookseller will make a display on the spot, and I often sell books just by stopping in for fifteen minutes.
Does it work for JA? Yes. This is what I spend the most time doing, and it has the most tangible and intangible benefits. While you won't dazzle every bookstore employee you meet, you only need to impress one out of ten, because that one can sell dozens, to hundreds, of books.
How much to spend: 38% of your budget, 30% of your time.

Writing Short Stories and Articles
Monetary cost: Tiny, for postage, and you usually get paid.
Time Cost: I don't count this as marketing time. I count this as writing time.

Benefits: Huge. Getting your stories into magazines, anthologies, and online, is the best form of advertising, bar none. You can reach large audiences, and hook them with your words. This is a key way to establish a name for yourself.
Word of Mouth Potential: Small. While short stories can lead to book sales, they aren't usually gabbed about.
Momentum: Small to medium. Reading a great short story may make a reader seek out an author, but there's a delay between the reading the the book purchase.
Does it work for JA? Yes. I write a lot of stories and articles. Each is like building another road that leads to Rome, or in this case, me. The more roads, the more traffic.
How much to spend: 3% of time and 2% of money, mailing these out. Don't count writing time as promotion time, even though these work as promotion.

Things I Avoid:

- **Paying a Publicist.** If you're a fiction writer, I haven't seen any evidence that justifies hiring a publicist. They can get you on the radio, but unless it is NPR or some huge syndicated show, I don't think this is worth paying for. I've done some radio, and haven't seen any effects. And I give good radio. You can set up events yourself without a publicist.
- **Paying for Internet Ads.** Banners, pay-per-click programs, Google ad words, search engine submissions, paid search engine rankings, advertising on websites, etc. I don't think this is effective. In fact, I think it annoys people. If you have a good website, people will link to you and find it automatically.
- **Bulk Mailing to Fans.** Besides the aforemetnioned postcards, I occasionally get newsletters, and sometimes books, because I belong to organizations like MWA, SinC, and HWA. Authors will buy mailing lists and send their junk mail to everyone on the list. I think this is a big waste of money. I've never bought a book that I heard about through the mail. But mailing free stuff to fans who request it is a great way to spread goodwill and word of mouth. If you're going to send a newsletter, use the Internet. It's a lot cheaper. And most people are annoyed getting something they didn't sign up for.
- **Paying Amazon.** Amazon has several programs that can suck money from a writer's pocket. Buy X get Y is one. If You Like X, Here's Y is another. I know authors who have tried this with miserable results. Amazon has a lot of free programs that can help steer people to your books. Amazon Shorts, Amazon Connect, Amazon Lists, Amazon Reviews. Use those instead. And remember that Amazon is a very small piece (less than 5%) of the bookselling pie.
- **Mucho Freebie Crap.** I give away signed coasters. My publisher makes these for me, so it is cost effective, and I sign them, which is unique and collectible. But while people seem to enjoy them, coasters don't sell books. Authors who invest big bucks in bookmarks, pens, food products with advertising wrappers, mugs, and clothing with book covers on them, are wasting their money. Have you ever bought a book because you saw the title on a pen? Neither has anyone else. A flyer is much cheaper, and offers much more information that can lead to a sale.

Conclusions
If your promotional budget for a year is $2000 (which really isn't much) here's how you should break it up:

- $100 on advertising
- $700 on attending conferences
- $100 on booksmarks/flyers/give-aways
- $200 on letters to bookstores and libraries
- $100 on your website costs
- $100 on speaking events (For gas. You'll spend much more than this per year, but you'll be compensated for much of it)
- $760 on booksignings (travel)
- $40 on postage for queries

If you spend 1000 hours a year on self promotion (which is close to three hours a day, which really isn't enough) here's how to break it up:

- 20 hours creating and placing ads
- 250 hours attending conferences
- 50 hours on bookmarks/flyers/give-aways
- 100 hours on letters to bookstores and libraries
- 100 hours on websites and blogs
- 150 hours on speaking events
- 300 hours on signings
- 30 hours sending out short stories and articles

Things get lopsided when you have more time and money to invest in promotion, because certain categories max out at how much you can do. You can never do too many appearances (unless they are all in the same area.) But you can print too many flyers.

Balance is the key. Try different things, figure out what works and what doesn't, and spend your time and money accordingly. Promotion is an organic process that changes and evolves. Some writers don't even believe it is necessary at all. Some writers spend a lot of time and money doing the wrong things, and become discouraged. Some writers swear their way is the only way, and your way sucks.

Only one thing is certain: Like everything in life, you get out what you put in.

Now go get 'em, tiger.

26 comments

Buzz, Balls, and Self-Promotion

Barry Eisler is guest blogging at MJ Rose's well known site, and he's sharing his take on marketing for writers.

Pretty much all of what he says is on the money and worth studying. But I don't think he takes his comments as far as he should.

One of the things Barry and I agree on is investing in your own career as if it were stock.

Investing in yourself does two major things. First, it compounds your publisher's efforts in getting your name out there, establishing a brand, and selling books. Second, it shows your publisher that you're willing to invest your own time and money into building a career.

I invest between 1/3 and 1/2 of my income on promotion. Most of it goes toward travel. I think conventions are essential in my genre (mystery/thriller). So are the several dozen indie bookstores that specialize in mystery. These should be visited.

I spend a lot of time and money doing online promotion, have an extensive mailing list, and am always running contests on my own dime.

I was fortunate that my publisher sent me on an eight city tour. While they set up 8 events in 11 days, I used the time to sign stock at 97 other stores in the areas they sent me.

Were they impressed? Yes.

The single most important thing an author must do is to make sure their publisher is happy. That means earning out your advance, being gracious and easy to work with, and making an effort promoting and marketing.

It's hard work, and I'd rather spend the money on bills, but at this early stage in the game I have to show my publisher what I can, and will, do in order to succeed.

I know too many mid-list authors who are wondering why their careers are stalled —-or finished. I don't want to be one of them.

Which is why I'm continuing my drive-by signing campaign, planning onhitting 300 more bookstores in the upcoming months.

Though having co-op placement (window, register, dump box, new release table, and end cap space that your publisher pays for) allows for a higher profile display and likelier customer purchase (and signed copies add to that), you don't have to have ten books in the store to benefit from a drop-in signing. Even Mary Midlist with two paperbacks in the Romance section can benefit.

Never underestimate the importance of the human contact, in this case author/bookstore employee. Impress someone working the register at a Border's, and she'll read your book. Once she's read you, she's a

fan. She can handsell you. She can keep your books on the shelf even when the home office says they need to be stripped. She can reorder more copies even though the computer says she shouldn't.

I've had bookstores handsell dozens, even hundreds, of my books. All because they met me.

Plus, in almost every drive-by I did, once the books were signed the employees promised they'd be prominantly displayed. I didn't even have to ask. Though I'm fortunate to have some co-op placement, in many cases my books were spine-out in the Mystery section. But once I signed them, they were moved to an end cap by the bookseller.

Booksellers like to meet authors, and they like to display signed books. It shows customers that they have a connection with authors, and that authors value their store enough to sign there.
Remember —my publisher didn't tour me for my first book, and I had no co-op. But I did a lot of drop-ins, and my publisher noticed, leading to a larger print run, more co-op and advertising, and a publisher tour.

Recruiting your publisher is hugely important. But selling those extra books is important too, even if it is only a few hundred.

Let's say you have a two book hard/soft deal.

Book #1 has a print run of 15,000. Your publisher expects to sell half of that, 7500, which is a standard sell-through for a new author.

But because there wasn't a lot of promotion, or co-op, you only sell 7000. Still respectable, but you aren't knocking their socks off.

Book #1 goes into paperback. They might have projected a 50k print run, but because hardback sales were weak, this drops to 40k. That means less promo dollars, less in-house enthusiasm, less puch from the sales reps to get the book into stores. No one wants to back a loser.

And for Book #2, the hardcover run also goes down, to 12k. Book buyers see this, view what sold previously, and buy less. Again, you have a smaller promo budget, less in-house enthusiasm, and your chances for a second contract don't look good.

The key to fixing this is promotion. Getting your name, and yourself, out there and selling the books. Ads, reviews, library talks, conferences, conventions, internet marketing, snail mail campaigns, website contests and booksignings. Meeting the booksellers and the fans is what can make the difference.

The Whiskey Sour paperback was released 2 months ago, but the hardcover hasn't been remaindered yet, even though it's been out for 15 months, because it is still selling. Because I'm the one selling it. Slowly but surely.

I'll be super candid here; this business scares the crap out of me. I spend hours in bookstores, hand selling, and am shocked by how few books sell. Those that do sell are because the buyer knows of the author, either by reading previous books or hearing about the books some how. The amount of books sold to browsers —-those folks who will plunk down $25 on a new author they've never heard of —-is very tiny.

Even a recent NYT bestseller sold 4900 paperbacks in Waldenbooks chain in 3 weeks.
Do the math. There are 700 Waldenbooks stores nationwide. Each sold about seven books in 21 days, or a book every 3 days.

One book every three days is not a lot (and these are paperbacks). Each day had ten hours worth of traffic —between 300 and 1000 customers a day, and for two out of every three days, her new book went unsold.

And she's a known name with a huge fanbase. She'll sell better than any of us.

Chances are, Waldenbooks will get two or three copies of your book, where they'll sit on a shelf for 4 months, then get returned for credit. because no one is going to buy your book if they've never heard of you.

Go to a bookstore. Look at the bestseller rack. Sit and watch it for eight hours (I've done this dozens of times). See how many copies of Lee Child's new one sell. You'll be lucky to see one get sold. And he's Lee Child.

There are exceptions. The Traveller. The Historian. DaVinci Code. Potter. 5 People in Heaven. But it's doubtful you'll be an exception.

So who is going to sell these books?

You are. That means meeting the booksellers. Meeting the fans. Signing stock. Doing drop-ins.
Signed books have a better chance at selling. Signed books that the bookseller recommends are an even better bet.

Do this as often as you can.

Of course, the single greatest form of advertising in the publishing business is... short story sales.

By the end of the year, I'll have had stories and articles in 4 issues of Ellery Queen (250k circultation each), 3 issues of Writer's Digest (180k circ. each), 1 issue of Alfred Hitchcock (250k circ), 1 issue of The Strand (50k circ,) 20 other magazines and anthologies (150k circ.) including the upcoming THRILLER anthology edited by James Patterson (which sold for the biggest advance in the history of anthologies and will get huge press and a huge release.)

That's my name in almost 2 million magazines and books. But not just my name —-my writing. And my writing is a much better form of advertising than any three color brochure or tiny b/w ad in the back of Mystery Scene.

If people read and enjoy a short story, they'll seek out the books. I have 1000's of emails from fans that back this statement up.

Cost to author: free, or you get paid. There's a time investment, but spending a week on a story that reaches two hundred thousand people seems to be a good return, plus you have the story forever. Writer's Digest reprinted my first article in two other publications (Novel Writing Magazine and Selling Your First Book magazine).

Which brings up the hackneyed expression "think outside the box."

The more that you learn about the way publishing works, the more that ideas spring to mind about who to best exploit it.

I found an agent in an unconventional way. I studied the industry and figured out what should work, even though all the how-to books said otherwise.
I've been selling my books in unconventional ways as well. I'll spend 6-8 hours in a bookstore, shaking the hand of everyone who walks in. I've met thousands of people, and sold thousands of books. Not too many other authors take this approach.

I consider short story sales and drive-by signings essential to a career, and I've been preaching this for a while. Not because Writer's Digest told me so. Because I looked at the industry, found a niche to exploit, and exploited it.

These methods may not work for everyone. But other methods could.

Necessity is the mother of invention, and authors need to find better ways to sell their books, or else they won't last long in this business.

Learn all you can about publishing. Not only from the outside, but from the inside as well.
You're a consumer, as well as a writer. What makes you buy a book? Figure that out, and concentrate your efforts on reproducing that effect for other consumers.

8 comments

What Works?

I believe the main hurdle the publishing industry has to overcome in the upcoming years, perhaps even bigger than embracing technology, is the ability to learn from its successes and mistakes.

This isn't easy. A book is a one-time unreproducible phenomenon, with many factors that ultimately lead to its profitability or lack thereof. There are no controls in the grand publishing experiment —if a book does well, you can't truly understand why, especially since many of those things done to promote that book were done for other books which didn't do well.

So learning is tough to do, especially in a business model that still relies on returns and offset printing.

As authors, we can't do much to fix the industry. But we have the same hurdle to overcome.

As a reader of this blog, you know I believe self-promotion is essential for authors. I report here on my successes, and try to offer practical information about what works and more importantly *why* it works. Or, why it doesn't work. No effort is wasted if we learn from it, but are we truly learning?

Here are several things I've done on the self-promotion front, and my honest evaluation of if they've worked or not.

1. Visiting Bookstores for Stock Signings

I know this works. Not in every case, but in enough of them to be worthwhile. Booksellers remember me, and they handsell the books. Of course it helps if you have free books to give away to them, and if you keep in touch periodically with emails or thank them by name in your acknowledgements.

What is the percentage of the worthwhile ones? I'd say one out of four.

2. Having a Booklaunch Party

This is certainly fun, and a nice way to kill a few hours with family, friends, and fans, but it never justifies the expense. Sure, you can write it off, but it's a lot of effort for only a few books sold to people who would probably buy them anyway.

3. Having a MySpace Page

I'm still amazed that I had MySpace Friends show up at my booksigings in Italy. MySpace is better than any newsletter or mailing list I've ever used. But it is a time black hole, and you'll spend weeks and weeks gathering up a Friend list before it becomes worthwhile. When it does start to pay off, you can meet hundreds, even thousands, of new readers, but you have to put in the effort to make that happen.

4. Selling Articles and Short Stories

This works better than anything else you can do. Get into as many anthologies, magazines, and webzines as you can. I'm constantly hearing from people who read my short stuff, which leads them to my longer stuff.

5. Giving It Away

This works. In the past few weeks, people have downloaded 600 free copies of Whiskey Sour on my website. Six hundred may not seem like a lot, but the majority of people visiting my website already know who I am, and they've already read Whiskey Sour. So these are brand new readers, which cost me nothing to find. And many of them are later buying the books —I know this, because they email. I've received no less than a hundred emails from folks who have enjoyed the download and then said they were going out to find more of my work.

6. Mass Mailings

Last year, with fellow scribe Julia Spencer-Fleming, I mailed out more than 7000 letters to libraries. This was very expensive, incredibly time-consuming, and while it got me some publicity, and while it introduced many librarians to my series, I didn't see enough results to say it was worth the effort.

That said, I've never bought a book because the author sent me a postcard either. Snail mail is easy to ignore, and I don't recommend it.

7. Conventions and Conferences

I used to be a convention whore, and attend all of them. These days, not so many.

At the start of your career, it's important to attend writing conventions. You meet your peers, and fans, and the occasional reviewer or media person, and you expand your base readership. But after a few years, meeting the same people again and again, going to a convention is more about the fun than about the self-promotion. You'll never sell more than a few dozen books, and unless you're invited and get a free ride (or paid to speak), it's impossible to justify the several hundred to several thousand dollar cost of attending.

After you visit a few conventions, use your promotional time and dollar to travel and visit bookstores instead.

Of course, if you have a free ride, always take it.

8. Libraries, Bookfairs, and Other Speaking Engagements

This is a crapshoot. Sometimes a lot of people show up. Sometimes very few. I do them because I'm still flattered that anyone would want me to speak anywhere, but I go into these believing they're a way to give back to the community rather than to sell books.

Sometimes, I get paid a lot and have a huge turnout. Sometimes, I get paid nothing and have a nice one-on-one with the event organizer. It's about 50/50.

9. Scheduled Booksigings

These are only worthwhile if you're a big enough name already, or if you're planning on staying for four hours and handselling books. If not, expect a humiliating experience where you don't sell many books, which costs you time and your publisher coop money.

10. Newsletters and Mass Emails

I do one a year, and that seems to be enough. It's important to have a newsletter, and to have a space on your website where people sign up for it. But don't bombard them with an email every week. A mass mailing, announcing your latest book, is effective, but I question the effectiveness of any other use.

11. A Blog

Yes, you need a website. But do you need a blog?

This blog gets anywhere from 300 to 1500 unique hits a day, though it averages about 600. When I post more often, the number goes up. But even if I don't post for a week or two, the numbers stay pretty consistent.

This is because my blog contains information that Google regularly searches, so new folks are constantly being directed to old posts. Some of them stay for a while. Some become long term readers. I've sold books, and gotten speaking engagements, because of this blog, so I believe blogs are worthwhile if you have something to offer, like expertise, information, aggregation, or opinion.

That said, go to Statcounter.com, get a free tracker, and see if anyone is reading. If not, your efforts are better spent elsewhere.

12. Contests

I used to think contests were important. Now I think it depends on the contest.

I ran a contest of sorts for Dirty Martini, thanking everyone who reviewed it int he acknowledgements of my next book, and sending them free stuff (it's coming, I swear!) and I got many more online reviews than any of my previous books. That was worth it.

I ran a library contest that garnered a few hundred entries. While I love libraries, the only ones entering were folks who already knew who I was, so this really was more of a way to thank libraries than get new libraries to order my books.

I ran a few writing contests, and while many websites mentioned them, the work to read all the entries was exhausting, and I don't think it did anything for my book sales. I won't do another one.

My publisher has run contests on websites, and I haven't seen any dramatic results from them.

Don't think that just because you're running a contest that people will enter, or that you'll get any publicity for it, or that people entering will buy your book. Contests are more of a "thank you" than a self-promotional tool.

13. Free Stuff

I give away a lot of freebies; signed coasters, magazines, books, etc, although these are more goodwill than fan recruitment. But I'll keep doing this, because my core fans should be rewarded, because they're helping to spread brand awareness and name recognition.

To date, I've given away more than 30,000 signed drink coasters. Do these sell books? No. But they are something novel to give to people I meet so they remember who I am, and unlike a bookmark or business card, they're autographed so people might hold onto them.
I consider the money I spend on coasters to be wasted, but well wasted. It always amuses me when I run into someone who talks about the signed coaster they got from me four years ago that they still have on their desk.

If you want to spend a few bucks on bookmarks, pens, postcards, flyers, keychains, etc, know it's going to be at a 100% loss. A good quality business card with your bookcover on it is all you really need.

14. Advertising

As I've said before, I think that modern human beings are immune to advertising. Those who say it helps to reinforce a brand are correct, it does reinforce a brand. But at what cost vs. what benefits?

My publisher has run some big ads for me. I've run some small ones. I believe their money is better spent on ARCs and coop, and my money is better spent on travelling.

This also applies to Internet advertising. How many times in the past week have you clicked on a pop up or a banner ad? Did it lead you to buying the product?

Of course, advertisers admit that a very small percentage of people exposed to any ad rush out and buy the product, but advertising leads to overall branding and product recognition.

To which I can say that I recognize thousands of products, and can even sing ad jingles from my youth, but I still have yet to buy any of them.

Book trailers have been around for a few years, but writers continue to extol their virtues. Yes, you can put it on YouTube and on your website and MySpace page, and it's pretty cool. But is it a few thousand dollars worth of cool?

I don't have any book trailers, so I don't know how many hits they get. I do have a video of me acting like an idiot on my site, and that gets a few hundred hits a month, along with garners me a lot of email. But that cost me $25, not $2500.

Plus, like everything you put on your site, the people who visit are most likely the people who know about you anyway, so who exactly are you recruiting?

If you want to do a book trailer, be sure you tract the hits it gets, track the email responses you get, Google how many people link to it, then post your honest results here so we can learn from them and figure out if they are worth the cost.

15. Your Publisher's Efforts

Your publisher can do more for your book than you ever could. So it's important to coordinate your efforts with them, keep a line of communication open, and always be gracious, thankful, and polite even if you

think they suck. You get more flies with honey than with vinegar, and a rep as someone difficult, unappreciative, and unrealistic can follow you forever.

16. Your Outlook

Winners act like winners. This sounds obvious, but the things you say and do in public can give the impression that you're one to watch or you're one to avoid.

Be one to watch in all of your professional relationships. A smile and a "thank you" is a lot more effective than a million dollar advertising campaign.

Conclusion

The goal is to get read. To be read, people must be made aware of your books. You can't make people buy them, or like them, or tell their friends about them.

But, as writers, we can help make the world aware that our books exist. The above are some of the things I've tried.

I measure a successful effort by the amount of time and money it takes versus the result it produces. I have no rigid method for this. A lot of my advance money goes toward self-promotion, and most of my time does.

Hardly anything pays for itself. But many of the above have intangible, unforeseeable benefits. Whatever you do, the rule seems to follow: the more you do, the more you get.

So take a look at your efforts. Look at the time and money you've spent. Then ask yourself:
What has worked for you and why?

Feel free to share your results here.

65 comments

Bad Promotion Techniques

I've blogged a lot about things writers can do to promote their books.

Here are some things they shouldn't do, both on the self-promotion front and in service of their careers.

Don't be pushy. Ever. It's about what you have to offer, not what you have to sell. Your main goal in self-promotion should be finding and meeting people who are looking for your type of book.

Don't be self-absorbed. If all you talk about is you, people will tune you out. A conversation isn't a monologue. Give and take should be part of all human interaction. No one wants to listen to you toot your own horn.

Don't be boring. Unfortunately, boring people never think they're boring. Short of videotaping yourself to see how you act, try taking your cues from the people you interact with. Do they seem into you, or anxious to escape? The better you can read your audience, the better you'll do.

Don't feel entitled. Yeah, you work hard. Good for you. That doesn't mean you deserve to be published, or you somehow earned your success. You got lucky. Feeling like the world owes you, or acting like God's Gift, is a sure way to annoy potential fans.

Don't be ungrateful. Being thankful, gracious, and helpful goes a long way. Don't bite the hand that feeds. Your fans, and anyone who helps you on your journey, deserve your attention and praise. Give freely of your time.

Don't be bitter. Yes, you got screwed. We all get screwed sometimes. Complain to your mom and a few close friends, but let the public always see you as successful.

Don't be defensive. There will be critics. There will be suggestions. There will even be people pissed at you. Don't take any of it personally, and diffuse the situation by listening to them and thanking them for their time. Once you put up your dukes, its hard to put them down again.

Don't be needy. Sure, you want to be read. Yes, you want your time in the spotlight. But fishing for compliments and begging for scraps are pathetic and embarrassing. Act confident at all times.

Don't be unprepared. You're a professional. There's no excuse for not giving 100% in everything you do that's related to your profession.

Did I miss anything?

16 comments

Interviewing 101

I've done quite a few interviews, both live and through email, and I always make sure I avoid the ***Common Interview Mistakes.***

What are the Common Interview Mistakes? I'm glad you asked.

1. **Being Long Winded.** Trust me, you aren't nearly as interesting as you think you are. Keep your answers short and punchy.
2. **Getting Off Track.** Stick to the topic and question, and limit the meandering. Focus, get to the point, then conclude.
3. **Reading Cue Cards.** It's easy to go on autopilot when you're asked the same question a thousand times. Remember that this may be the first time your audience hears your answer, so make sure you don't sound like you're repeating something you memorized.
4. **No Enthusiasm.** Being upbeat and enjoying the process is just as important as anything you have to say. Your answers won't be remembered. Your attitude will.
5. **Being Boring.** The best interviews entertain as well as inform. Infodumps are yawn-inducing. But clever banter, jokes, and controversy are always welcome.
6. **Hesitating.** In live interviews, using 'uh' and 'um' all the time is unprofessional, and sounds bad. In print interviews, make sure every word counts. You probably don't need many of those modifiers, that back story, or that description. Cut it.
7. **Not Understanding Image.** Too many authors don't consider what kind of image they want to portray. This is a lost opportunity, because a carefully cultivated and maintained image goes a long way to helping you establish your brand. I've worked hard to be known as a tireless self-promoter, as an outrageous personality, and as a writer who combines laughs with scares. Everything I do in the public eye is geared toward advancing these images.
8. **Pomposity.** No one likes a person who is self-absorbed, superior, dismissive, or ungrateful. Be nice, and be humble. Your shit stinks. Believe it.
9. **Ignoring Time and Space.** I'm not talking about physics. I'm talking about time slots and space considerations. If your radio spot is supposed to last for two minutes, don't have ten minutes worth of things to say. If your interview has to be 800 words, don't give them 2000. Stay within the expected duration.

Interviews are tremendous opportunities for writers. Don't waste them.

13 comments

Library Events 101

At some point in your writing career, you'll be asked to appear at a library.

Library events are great opportunities for authors. You get publicity. You get a public forum for spreading your message. And often, you get paid and/or sell some books.

But if you're asked to speak at a library, what is expected, and how should you handle it?

Here's a quick rundown of the basics.

How do I get invited to speak at libraries?

Because you're a savvy author with a hip, informative website, who is constantly attending writing conferences and festivals, you're probably already on the radar of many libraries.

If your email isn't already overflowing with library appearance requests, you may need to grease the wheels a bit.

Network and schmooze. Librarians like books, and often attend book-related events, like booksignings, conventions, and conferences. Meet them, talk them up, offer yourself as a speaker, and give them a business card with contact info.

You can also contact local libraries and offer your services. Check Google, your local Yellow Pages, and www.public-libraries.org.

Once I'm invited, what do I charge?

Some libraries will pay you hundreds of dollars to appear. Some with give you a handshake and a thank you. Most are somewhere in between.

If the library is giving me a stipend (I've gotten as much as $300 for an appearance) then I make sure they get some free stuff from me (books, audios).

I also sign the library's copies. Then they'll hopefully be stolen, and new ones will be ordered. :)

If a library every asks what your speaking fee is, tell them you'll take an average of the last three speakers they've paid. I do free events all the time, but many libraries have event budgets, and must spend them or else risk losing them.

I don't bring up the fee —I let them do that. If they don't bring it up, they're probably not offering one. Which is fine; a free appearance still gives you a publicity soapbox and the opportunity to sell your books.

Who sells books at a library event?

Sometimes the library will have a local bookseller do all of the sales for an event. If that's the case, make sure you get in touch with the bookseller several weeks beforehand, to make sure they know which of your books to carry. If your books can't be ordered through distributors (they're self-pubbed or out of print) work out the split you're giving the bookseller prior to the event (usually 40% off cover price.)

Sometimes they'll ask you to bring your own books. If it's a big library event, with lots of authors, ask a local indie to attend and sell books.

My indie orders extra books for me and sells them to me at cost —-a 40% discount, plus they count toward my royalty.

If you're doing a solo library event, bring the books yourself. You won't be able to accept credit cards, but feel free to take cash and checks (bring change with you).

It's always a crapshoot as to how many books you bring. The most I've every sold at a library event is 30. I usually bring 20 paperbacks and ten hardcovers. Sometimes I'll also bring magazines that features stories of mine, and I'll give a free mag to anyone who buys a book.

For libraries, I usually charge attendees a flat $20 for hardcovers, and $5 for paperbacks —the goal is to be read, not make $$$ —-even though you can make a few hundred bucks selling books at a big event.

What should I do to publicize the event?

List it on your website, blog, MySpace, newsletter, etc. Ask the library if they'll list the event in the local paper. Offer to drop off flyers a week before the event for the library to pass out to patrons. And suggest more than one author attend.

With library events, the more authors there are, the bigger the draw. Keep that in mind if/when you begin soliciting libraries —-they're more amicable to having an event if you can get some of your writing friends to join you for it. It becomes a bigger deal and will likely get more publicity and a bigger crowd.

For that reason, get know the local authors near you and make sure to share speaking opportunities.

What do I do when I'm at a library event?

You'll be expected to sing for your supper. Have a speech planned, and know what it is you're going to talk about (platform, baby.)

Prior to going on, work the audience. I introduce myself to everyone who came, shake their hands, and give them a free signed coaster (a flyer or a bookmark also works.) This gets them on my side before I go on stage.

If you're afraid of speaking in public, or you suck, you have a choice: get better, or don't do it. I've seen authors do their careers great disservices because they felt they were a lot more interesting then they actually were.

Keep it funny. If you can't be funny, keep it moving.

I've found that readings —unless they're uber short —bore people. For libraries, my standard schtick is to do a Q&A with myself that I culled from email questions. That way I can get all the obvious ones out of the way (why do you write for a female hero, where do you get your ideas, why JA and not Joe, why do you mix humor and scares, why did you become a writers, etc.)

Save time for questions at the end, but don't expect anyone to ask any. People have to be goaded into participating.

For more public speaking tips, visit http://jakonrath.blogspot.com/2006/03/conventions-panels-you.html

Events usually last between one and two hours. It should go without saying that you need to be gracious, thankful, on time, prepared, and easy going. Whenever you appear in public, you are a spokesperson for your brand. People come to these things wanting to like you. Don't give them any reasons to draw a different conclusion.

What if no one shows up? What if I don't sell any books? What if the event goes badly?

Welcome to the writing biz.

I've had library appearances where eighty people showed up and I made a few hundred bucks. I've also driven 200 miles one-way to greet a throng of two people.

Remember that there's no such thing as a bad experience if you can learn from it. No one said this was going to be easy, fair, or fun.

But, like all promotion, the more you do, the better you do. I've been on local TV and radio, been invited to attend conferences and festivals all expenses paid, gotten interviews, and have made some pretty good money, all because I've done library events. The intangible benefits can be substantial.

Plus it's never a waste of time to meet librarians, because they have big hearts. It has to do with thier excellent circulation.

And yes, you can use that joke.

11 comments

Libraries

In the wide wide world of self-promotion, what role do libraries play?

A significant one, I believe.

I do perhaps two dozen library events a year. Sometimes the crowd is large. Sometimes only a few people show up. Sometimes they pay me a lot of money. Sometimes I just receive a warm thank you. Sometimes I bring my own books and sell a bunch. Sometimes a bookseller attends the event and only sells a single Whiskey Sour paperback. But I never feel my time has been wasted.

Every library I've visited has publicized the event somehow, whether it's just a mention on their website and newsletter, or a flyer campaign, or even cable TV and radio spots.

Some of my biggest, most enthusiastic fans are librarians.

About 1/5 of all of the email I receive from fans are from people who have discovered me in a library.

There are over 10,000 libraries in the United States. Some of them have ordered as many as fifty copies of my hardcovers.

I've never been treated poorly at a library; they're always happy to have me.

Library events, unlike bookstore events, aren't dependent on sales to be successful. As a result, they're always more fun.

Last weekend I conducted a writing workshop at the main library branch in Rockford, IL. The turnout was decent —-about 20 people. Some of them bought books. Some of them showed up just to meet me, because they were fans. All of them were nice people, and a pleasure to meet.

Yesterday I did a half hour conference call with a book group that meets at a library in Akron, OH. It was too much fun, and I didn't even have to shower beforehand.

I have author friends who don't bother with libraries, because they don't feel it's worth their time and effort. That's crazy.

Libraries are the hubs of many communities. When promoting, writers must be ambassadors, spreading good will, recruiting a fan base. It isn't always about selling a lot of books. Sometimes it's about getting your face and name out there. Libraries are a perfect venue for this.

For one of Lawrence Block's book tours he visited libraries exclusively. He considered the tour very successful.

These reasons, and more, are why I devote a lot of time and energy to library events. And starting next month, I'm also devoting a lot of money to libraries as well.

In October, another author and I will be sending out several thousand personal letters to libraries. Most libraries order books through distributor catalogs, patron requests, and by reading industry mags like PW, Kirkus, Booklist, and Library Journal. By targeting these libraries directly, we're hoping to stand out amoung the 250,000 other books published every year, and improve our sales to this larget market.

Is it worth investing a few grand? Time will tell. I'll keep you posted, and supply more details as this crystalizes.

6 comments

Libraries #2

So here's the deal.

The multi-talented and multi-award winning Julia Spencer-Fleming and I will be sending out promo packages to more than 6300 libraries in 28 states.

For those who haven't read Julia yet, she writes the highly entertaining mystery thriller series featuring the unlikely team of Police Chief Russ Van Alstyne and Episcopal priest Clare Fergusson. The action takes place in the Adirondack town of Millers Kill, NY.

Four books so far, beginning with the wonderful IN THE BLEAK MIDWINTER. Her latest, TO DARKNESS AND TO DEATH, is her best yet, and all the action takes place in a single day —a nifty high-concept idea that I'm going to use for FUZZY NAVEL, Jack Daniels #5 (after DIRTY MARTINI, which I'm working on right now).

Buy Julia's books. You'll like them. And check out her website, www.juliaspencerfleming.com. She's one of a handful of authors who is as insane about self-promotion as I am.

Included in out library package will be:

1. A two page interview with me and Julia
2. A double-sided brochure for the Miller's Kill series
3. A double-side brochure for the Jack Daniels series
4. A postcard/coaster from each of us, autographed

Now let's crunch numbers and see how this works.

Printing costs will be about $300 each. Shipping will be about $2300, and envelopes about $200. I'm sprining for shipping and envelopes, because Julia is the one who painstakingly gathered all of the library addresses.

So I'll be into this for about $2800.

I make 55 cents on a paperback sale, $3.00 on a hardcover sale, and about $6.00 on an audiobook sale.

Through my efforts, I'll need to sell 5090 paperbacks, or 933 hardcovers, or 466 audiobooks to break even. Or some combination thereof.

That seems very doable. If only one out of six libraries buys an audiobook, I've made back my investment.

I'm hoping that the personal touch —-which includes a signed coaster and information on how to enter a library contest —-will prompt those librarians who have never ordered my books to give them a try, and those librarians who have ordered my books before to buy the newest book in larger numbers, or more copies of my backlist.

Though I only have two books out (with the third coming in May) I have an astonishing 16 products available to purchase. They include:

Whiskey Sour:
Unabridged cassette 978-1-59355-487-7
Unabridged CDs 978-1-59355-489-3
Unabridged MP3-CD 978-1-59335-479-7
Unabridged Download 978-1-59335-976-2 Through OverDrive
Hardcover 1-4013-0087-1
Paperback 0-7868-9072-X

Bloody Mary:
Unabridged cassette 978-1-59355-491-0
Unabridged CDs 978-1-59355-493-4
Unabridged MP3-CD 978-1-59335-866-2
Unabridged Download 978-1-59335-088-5 Through OverDrive
Hardcover 1-4013-0089-8
Paperback 0-7868-9074-6

Rusty Nail:
Unabridged CDs 978-1-59355-497-2
Unabridged MP3-CD 978-1-59335-867-9
Unabridged Download 978-1-59335-658-0 Through OverDrive
Hardcover 1-4013-0088-X

So I should be able to at least break even, don't you think? I don't believe many libraries hear from authors directly, and I'm hoping this will spur them on to give me and Julia a shot.

Your thoughts?

I haven't included the Adobe and Microsoft Reader text download editions in the brochure, because I'm not sure libraries use these. Can some librarian reading this let me know?

Even if I don't see any immediate results of this campaign, it can't hurt getting my name and book titles in front of librarians. They may not order immediately, but when the next Ingram r Bake & Taylor catalog comes around, maybe the they'll be more apt to buy me.

Plus, I'll write the expense off.

When I get the complete package together, I'll make it available on my website for download, so people can take a look.

On an unrelated note, I'm somewhat sad to see yet another audio format rendered obsolete during my lifetime.

First 8-tracks. Then vinyl. Now, finally, cassettes are going the way of the dinosaur. According to Brilliance, my audio publisher, stores are no longer going to stock books on tape —-only on CD and MP3. So Rusty Nail will be without a cassette release.

On another unrelated note, my books are now in 6 foreign countries: Japan, France, Russia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Thailand. The markets I really want to crack —England, Germany, and Australia —remain elusive.

29 comments

Library Redux

So the great library campaign is reaching fruition. For those who are just tuning in, here's the skinny:

Award winning author **Julia Spencer-Fleming** and I interviewed each other. We each made a brochure. I had Bloody Mary coasters made and signed them. We're sending this package out to 6500 libraries.

Here are the specifics:

The coaster creation entailed Photoshopping an image (got some help from a friend for $50), I bought 6500 coasters at 12.2 cents each ($800), bought 6500 addressed envelopes ($350), printed 6500 double sided brochures (lazer printer $179, cartridge $80, two toner refils $30, 13 reams of paper, $43).

Plus, postage, which is $2400.

So far, I'm into this for just about $4000. I'm spending roughly 62 cents on each library.

I'm paying for postage, because Julia compiled the library list, which cost her a pretty penny. She's also paying to print the interview (about $350) and she supplied the library labels ($200) and her own brochures.

Libraries do their ordering from catalogues supplied by the publisher, by catalogues supplied by the distributors (Ingram and Baker & Taylor,) and through reading reviews in Library Journal, Kirkus, PW, and Boolist, plus others. Patron requests and word-of-mouth also are a factor.

I earn 55 cents for each paperback sold, $3.44 for each hardcover, and between $5 and $8 for each audiobook.

To earn back my investment, I'm going to need to sell 570 audiobooks, or 7272 paperbacks, or 1143 hardcovers, or any combination thereof.

I have two hardcovers in print, one paperback, two MP3s, two cassettes, and two CDs. I'm also got another paperback, hardcover, MP3, CD, and cassette that I'm including information about, coming out in June of 2006.

So basically, I'm selling fourteen things.

The brochure includes pictures of the book covers, blurbs, ISBNs, ordering info, brief synopses, contact info, and reviews. It took me 8 hours to create, and looks pretty good.

The interview is fun, light, but also imparts some detailed info about each of our series and why we love libraries.

So far, I've signed 3200 coasters. It's taken me three days, three hours a day, and I've gone through five Sharpies.

The printing is a huge pain in the butt, because the brochure is double-sided, but the printer only does single-sided, so everything has to be fed through twice. I spent four hours printing today, and got through 1000 copies. I could have had this done for 6 cents a copy, or $390. I bought a printer, toner, and paper for $332, and I get to keep the printer, so I went the do-it-myself route.

I figure I can be done with the signing and the printing by Thanksgiving.

That still leaves the folding (the brochure is tri-folded) and the stuffing envelopes and adding stamps. I looked into bulk mailing, but to set that up is $300 right off the bat, and postage would be the same.

Besides the 4 grand, I'll be into this project for about 80 hours when I finish.

Is it worth it?

I doubt I'll recoup my money, let alone my time. But I have no way of knowning, because no one has ever hit the library market like this before. I'm in uncharted waters.

This isn't an impersonal postcard. This is actual correspondence from real writers, with readable content. It's funny. It includes a signed coaster. It's presented in an unique way, and it's focused on only two authors, rather than hundreds in a catalogue or review magazine.

This is cheaper than an ad in a big magazine or newspaper. It's direct marketing in it's purest form — selling to a specific target audience that wants to buy books.

I'm assuming 1/3 to 1/2 of these libraries already have something of mine. This will help reinforce my brand, make them aware of my audiobooks, add to name recognition, and perhaps make them take notice of the books they already have sitting on their shelf, which would result in larger orders down the road.

We'll see what happens.And for all who are interested, here's what the package looks like (I'll add Julia's brochure when she sends me a pdf file)

- **Front of JA's Brochure**
- **Back of JA's Brochure**
- **Signed Coaster**
- **Interview**

25 comments

DeceptiKonrath

Michael Bay's latest blockbuster film, Transformers, is coming soon to a theater near you. I'm predicting it will make a lot of money.

For the three of you who don't remember, Transformers were toys from the 1980s. One of them was a robot that looked like a truck, which, with some clever manipulation, could be transformed into a truck that looked like a robot.

Why will a movie based on a 25 year old toy make a lot of money?

Branding.

We remember Transformers the same way we all remember toys from our youth —-with rose colored glasses. This movie has automatic name recognition with the Gen-X crowd. Many have children, who are the same age as they were when Transformers came out. They'll want to bring their kids and relive their own childhood.

Plus, Transformers have taken over our stores. You can't go into a supermarket, fast food chain, or watch TV without being assaulted by new Transformer toys and products.

It all fuels name recognition, which generates interest. Transformers will have a huge opening week.

But it will only be able to sustain ticket sales if the movie is good. If the movie is awful, ticket sales will plummet. Word-of-mouth has killed many big movies. I remember Battlefield Earth toys available at my local Toys R Us for fifty cents each. You can't market a turd.

Selling books (you knew we'd get around to that, right?) is also about name-recognition and branding. But word-of-mouth is essential too. A big marketing push by your publisher will fuel demand, but that demand will only be sustained if people like the book and tell other people about it.

Dirty Martini has been out officially for about a week, and began to trickle into stores two weeks ago.

From what I can interpret watching Amazon.com and calling Ingram, the book is doing better than the previous three.

Coop is part of that. Dirty Martini is on the new release table in the chains and major indies. It is in the public eye. Publicity plays a part. Dirty Martini is a Booksense Pick for August, which should help it sell in the indie stores. There have been some great reviews.

Name-recognition is also key. People who enjoyed my previous novels are buying this one. The time I've spent schmoozing booksellers and acquiring MySpace friends is helping my cause (I had three MySpace Friends show up to signings I had in Italy. MySpace works.)

I haven't begun promoting Dirty Martini yet. Very soon my newsletter will go out to 12k people, and I'll do a big Internet promotion. That should spike my numbers. Especially since I'll be "buying" advertising space with contests and freebies (you'll see what I mean when the newsletter is released.)

I'll also be doing some limited touring, which will help the cause.

But, ultimately, the fate of Dirty Martini, and of the series, comes down to word-of-mouth. If people like it, they'll tell others about it. Much of my promotion has been geared toward booksellers, because they are word-of-mouth megaphones. This time around, I'm going to see how many fans I can reach via the net to get them to spread the word.

Another thing about word-of-mouth; it builds. Now that I have four books out, I've found books are four times easier to sell. If I hook one new fan, they'll buy all four. As more books of mine are printed, they reach more people, which generates more word-of-mouth. As more books of mine are released, they take up more shelf space at libraries on at bookstores, leading to more people discovering them.

There's a snowball effect. Sales build on sales. James Rollins once told me that a hardcover is just an advertisement for the paperback. I believe a hardcover is an advertisement for the whole backlist.

But this cumulative effect only happens as long as books are still available. Which is why I spend so much time promoting, not just the new release, but the backlist as well.

The newsletter is coming soon. If you haven't signed up for it yet, visit www.jakonrath.com.

13 comments

Ads

Though the venerable **MJ Rose** differs in opinion (and makes some good points) I don't believe that print advertising is effective or worthwhile.

My rationale is simple: I don't buy books because I view their ads, so I don't expect anyone else to do so either. Why would I spend money —-sometimes a lot of money —-using a form of promotion that I don't think is effective?

The trap many new authors fall into is that they realize this business is hard and they feel they must do *something.* So they indulge in what I call the Unholy Triad:

1. Send out postcards with their book jacket on them
2. Have bookmarks made
3. Buy ads in genre magazines

As far as my experience goes, none of these are effective forms of advertising, and none of them sells books.

Of the three, I believe ads are the least effective, while also being the most expensive.

Those who make their living by creating ads, and publications (including websites) that sell ad space, will tell you ads are effective for several reasons.

As an Announcement - For brand name authors, an ad informs the pre-existing readership that a new book is now available.

JA's Opinion - I slightly agree. If someone is a mega-huge bestseller, then an ad in a large publication (the New York Times, People Magazine, Entertainment Weekly) will help to spread the word.

But that author's die-hard fans will have already known about the book. They'll have viewed the author's website, read genre magazines and reviews, and have been eagerly anticipating it.

If you're a new or midlist author, a big ad won't affect those who haven't heard of you, and your diehard fans will probably already know about the upcoming release.

As a Reinforcement - Advertising is just part of a writer's marketing and publicity arsenal; a prong on the multi-tined fork of book touring, conferences, media exposure, reviews, interviews, etc.

The goal of all marketing is to establish brands, and the more places a would-be customer can see references to your book, the likelier it will be lodged in their subconscious.

JA's Opinion - I disagree. Advertising is so pervasive, we tune it out. The passive nature of print ads makes this very easy to do. Because most ads offer little in the way of actual content (other than an announcement) they are instantly recognized as ads by our subconscious and dismissed.

I'll prove my point. Other than any ads for your own books, can you recall someone else's book ad? If you're a reader, you've seen thousands. You can remember TV commercials from 20 years ago. But can you close your eyes and visualize a book ad you've seen before?

And if you do in fact remember a few, did you buy the books?

As an Introduction - Ads arouse curiosity about new authors and books. If someone is a noir fan, and actively seeks out noir, an ad could make them aware of something they hadn't known existed.

JA's Opinion - I disagree. You can't judge a book by its ad. First of all, ads are biased, and people know this. Ads don't impart any information that would allow the reader to make an informed decision about whether or not to buy the book.

Second, even if the ad did pique interest, there is no forward momentum that will lead to a sale. If you see an effective print ad, what is the likelihood you'll put down the magazine and then rush to the computer or immediately jump into the car and head to a bookstore?

As an Incentive - A print ad that provokes action, such as a coupon, sale announcement, or contest, offers value. Ads like this give to the consumer, rather than take from them, and are effective.

JA's Opinion - I agree, if the ad is for a grocery store or Wal-Mart. No one has effectively used coupons to sell books.

Every once and a while a publisher will cut the price of a book (like $4.99 paperbacks or $15 hardcovers) as an incentive to buy, but that's a point of purchase incentive.

Publishers will also occasionally have big contests to launch books. Win money, or a trip, or a car. Considering how rarely this is done, I can't imagine they're having huge successes with this gimmick. I believe that people buy books because they like the books, not because they could win a cruise.

In my experience, getting people to enter a contest is difficult, because there is no momentum between ad and action.

Ads as Status - Big splashy ads, or a large ad campaign, tells readers that this is a big book which the publisher is behind, and they should see what all the buzz is about. If an author seems to be everywhere, they must be good, and they will be talked about.

JA's Opinion - The amount of hype it takes to impress a reader is beyond anyone's capacity, unless you're Dan Brown.

But I do think it is important to get your name in as many palces as possible. Instead of ads, do interviews, articles, and shorts stories. These are free (or they pay you) and you can still get a piece of the buzz pie.

Who are Ads Really For? - I think that ads are so pervasive in this world not because they work well, but because they appeal to the vanity of the advertiser, and offer a false sense of empowerment.

Author X has a book coming out. She places ads because she feels she has to be doing something. Publisher Y wants to impress Author X, so they take out some big ads to show her that they're behind her.

Lots of money gets wasted, both on creating and placing these ads, and this budget gets tacked onto the Profit and Loss statement for this book.

My publisher placed several ads for BLOODY MARY in mystery magazines, including The Strand, Crimespree, Ellery Queen, and Alfred Hitchcock, to the tune of a few grand. That meant I'd have to sell over 1000 books beyond what I would have normally sold, as a direct result of the ads. I don't think this occurred.

I liked the ads a lot (here's one at http://www.jakonrath.com/Ad3.jpg) and really appreciated my publisher's efforts. But it wasn't cost-effective, and I wouldn't ever ask them to do this again.

Should You Ever Buy an Ad? - Well, I just did.

I know, I know —-I just spent this entire blog railing against print ads, so why would I buy one?

Here's the story: The mystery zine **Crimespree**, run by the always charming Jon and Ruth Jordan, is putting out a special issue for **Thrillerfest.** This issue is being given away free, as a promotional item to get new readers interested in the magazine. That means everyone at Thrillerfest will get a copy.

Jon is reprinting a funny article by me, tweaked for the Thrillerfest audience, to put into this issue. So he's giving me free publicity.

For him to afford to give out magazines gratis, he needs authors to pay for ads. So me placing an ad is quid pro quo.

Plus, having an ad in conjunction with my article will perhaps help me stand out a smidgen while surrounded by all of those superstar authors. Or not.

I thought at length about the kind of ad I wanted to put in Crimespree. What would be memorable? What would get people talking and get them curious about my books?

This is what I came up with: http://www.jakonrath.com/Ad4.jpg

It took about ten minutes to put together, at no cost to me, and I think it's funny, effective, and unusual enough to stand out.

Will it sell piles of books?

I'm not holding out much hope.

But I think it will get a few second glances, and a laugh or two.

And if any author reading this is interested, I can do a similar ad for you, for the small fee of nine hundred dollars. Because without advertising, you might as well just flush your career down the toilet...

35 comments

Rant Against Advertising

Here is a dirty little secret that even publishers don't know: No one in this business knows what they're doing. Everyone thinks they know what they're doing. But know one knows.

Consider the Skinner pigeons.

Group A pecked on a little lever, and received a treat. As a result, they pecked on the lever when they were hungry.

Group B pecked on the lever, but nothing happened. As a result, they never pecked on the lever.

Group C pecked on the lever, but they only received a treat occasionally. As a result, they pecked on the lever non-stop.

When your actions are rewarded sporadically, you still link your efforts with the rewards, even if there is no direct connection. This is because you're unable to judge the effectiveness of your efforts, since the results are sporadic.

Now consider publishing. Publishers know that in order to make money, they have to spend money. But they aren't sure what to spend money on, because they always get mixed results.

Let's apply this specifically to advertising.

Sometimes publishers buy a huge ad, see a sales spike, and attribute the spike to the ad (even though it may have had no direct connection.)

Sometimes they buy a huge ad, get no sales spike, and wonder why it didn't work. So, like Skinner's Group C, they buy another ad.

Your publisher will keep pecking away, hoping for rewards. Ads are part of their tried and true arsenal. They know they must spend money, so they spend money on ads. But is this a case of ads being beneficial? Or is this just habit?

In my experience (which is flawed like everyone else's) ads don't work for new or midlist writers. An ad as a tool to get people into a bookstore fails because there are too many steps that need to be taken between awareness and purchase.

If you see an author speak, and the book is being sold right there, the distance between awareness and purchase is only a few seconds —the customer takes the book to the register.

People are immune to advertising. They forget it three seconds after seeing it. Even if the ad got them interested in the book, the purchase isn't easy or instant. They have to get in the car, go to a bookstore, find the book, and even then they'll look at it before they actually buy it. The book sells the book, not an ad.

Some say ads reinforce a brand, and customers will remember the product after seeing it several times. That's why the same commercials get repeated over and over within the same one hour time slot.

I believe that content sells. Not advertising.

If you want to reach a specific crowd, visit the specific crowd. If you want to sell books to a demographic, target that demographic with your work, not with your ads.

For example: if you write mysteries about quilting, there are plenty of quilting magazines you can target. Rather than place ads in these magazines, you should write articles for them, or short stories for them. Or give them an ARC and encourage them to review it, or do an interview.

And this is free (or they pay you.)

Branding works when people have a favorable experience with a product, and keep returning to the product to have the same experience. Ads can reinforce a brand, but they don't *create* a brand. That's why a Stephen King ad works —it's an announcement. But an ad used to sell a product, rather than remind someone of a positive experience with a product, is a lot of money spent on a very small return.

It doesn't matter how many amazing hair dye ads I see, I'm never going to buy hair dye. I'm not the target market. The target market is a very tiny percentage of everyone exposed to the ad, and even if someone is actively looking for hair dye, awareness that a product exists is still a long way away from getting someone to try the product. Especially since the hair dye buyer is probably already brand loyal to something else.

Don't agree? Consider Bouchercon. Every year, attendees get goody bags filled with books. And every year, hundreds of books wind up discarded.

These people are the intended demographic for these books, and they're getting them free, and they're still throwing them away.

Why is this?

A book essentially advertises itself with its cover, jacket copy, genre, and quality of writing. Certain people don't like certain books, so even a free copy won't persuade them to try something new. Why would an ad do so, when the actual product (free) doesn't?

Of course, some free books are kept and read, and new fans are gained. This is because a free book actually offers an experience. An ad only offers the promise of an experience, in a way we've become immune to.

I challenge anyone to pick up a copy of PW, read through it, and honestly judge the effectiveness of the ads. Do they prompt you to buy the book? Do they reinforce branding and name recognition?

They do? Okay —-the next day, see how many of those ads you can remember.

Of course, if you're in advertising, or if you're doing this because I suggested it, you may actually retain more than normal. So try this:

Think about the last magazine you read. Can you remember any of the ads? Why or why not? Did any of them reinforce brands? Did any of them make you aware of new products? Did any of them make you rush out any buy something?

I was reading a magazine two hours ago. I can remember four of the articles I read. I can't remember a single ad.

I've experimented with ads, and so has my publisher. I've found that the amount of money it costs to run can be much better used for promotion that produces immediate, tangible effects, such as appearances.

The problem (and even advertisers admit this) is that there's no real idea of what works and what doesn't. And because advertising is used in conjunction with other forms of promotion, there is no way to judge the effectiveness of it.

Save the hundreds of dollars on a trade ad and go to a conference. You still won't sell nearly enough books to justify the cost of travel, but you're a much better (and more memorable) spokesperson for your book than an ad.

Of course, I encourage everyone to draw your own conclusions from your experiences. Try everything at least once. But know why you're trying it, and what you expect from it.

31 comments

Rant Against Advertising Part 2

I've been thinking about this a bit more, and came up with a few offbeat ideas.

It's human nature that people often spend more time and energy justifying their actions instead of examining them.

In the case of advertising, what if it truly doesn't work, but everyone is so busy trying to think up reasons it must work that they aren't looking at it deeply enough?

"Everyone else is doing it, so we should to."

"What else should we do with a promotional budget?"

"We've advertised many books, and some of them made money, so advertising must have played a part."

"We've been using advertising since our company began, and long before that."

"We know half of all advertising works, we just don't know which half."

No one seems to agree on what makes an effective ad, or campaign. And it's impossible to recoop the high cost of advertising since it seems to be more about promoting brand awareness rather than actually selling products.

Another basic human trait is a deep rooted fear of making a bad decision, being wrong, and looking stupid. This means everyone would rather follow blindly what came before rather than analyze it and come up with alternate ideas and solutions that might fail.

So publishers continue to buy ads. But what if they didn't? Would newspapers and magazines would quickly go bankrupt.

Maybe not. Anyone who reads women's magazines (I write for a female character, remember?) has noticed a trend that has been going on for years: the advertising column. It looks like a feature, and reads like a feature, but is actually an ad. You can tell it's an ad because it usually says "special advertising section" in small letters on the top of the pages.

These special advertising sections usually are an interview, a slice of life, or an explanation of how something works. TV has been doing this for decades in the form of infomercials.

These aren't just ads. They offer content, rather than simply try to sell a product. There's enough information to allow the reader to make an informed decision, plus a little entertainment to make it go down easy.

One of the big reviewing mags (I think it was PW) started a program a few years ago where authors and publishers could pay for reviews. The industry frowned on it, because it seemed ethically wrong.

But what if newspapers and magazines accepted content —paid for by book publishers —instead of ads? What if the NYT ran a full page interview with Michael Connelly, rather than a full page ad, but charged the same? Is that unethical?

Or what if it ran a column by Connelly, writing about his latest book?

Or would it be unethical if Connelly's publisher paid Stephen King to write a review of Connelly's new book, and then paid the NYT to publish it?

What if it ran a full page Harry Bosch short story that was tied-in to the new Connelly book, which the publisher paid for? Or if it printed the first chapter, but again with the publisher paying rather than the newspaper paying (how many newspapers even buy first serial rights anymore?)

Would newspaper/magazine readers prefer this to a ton of ads they just ignore? Or would this blur the line between content and advertising and piss readers off?

I think it would be nice to open a newspaper and not have ads every page. Let the ads stay where they belong —in the classified section, and in the inserts. Inserts work like catalogs, and people like them (try to find a newspaper the day after Thanksgiving —everyone buys them for the sales inserts.)

Speaking of inserts, what if a publisher did that? Instead of some ads in the paper, they could have a mini catalog: "This Winter from St. Martins." Just like Target, Sears, and Home Depot, except it lists upcoming and newly released books. Borders and BN do it. Why not the publishers? Why would they rather blow $50k on a full page ad? The catalog could also include content, like interviews and excerpts and perhaps even coupons. It might be costly, but if there were three dozen books in the catalog, each contributing their share of the marketing budget, it seems doable.

How about smaller magazines. Could they survive without ads?

Let's look at **Crimespree**, which has become a must buy for many mystery fans and authors. What if, instead of standard ads, authors and publishers paid Crimespree to run little mini essays?

Example: for a set amount of money, the author would get half a page which would feature a picture of the book cover, and a short column on why they wrote the book. It would cost the same as a regular ad (and probably be cheaper to produce —it's just a jpg of the cover and a dozen sentences.) But it would actually offer content, and I'd think it would do a better job selling the books than the standard cover+blurbs. At the very least, it would be more entertaining than a standard ad, and less apt to be glossed over.
I'd buy an ad like that. Plus I'd buy extra copies of the magazine to give to people. And wouldn't it be fun to read what authors think of their own books in their own words?

I have no idea if these things would work, but I'd like to see someone try them. Not only would it make newspapers and magazines more interesting and less annoying to read, but it might actually sell a few books.

What do you think?

50 comments

Rant Against Advertising Part 3

As I've said before, I offer advice and opinion based on what works for me. You need to decide for yourself what works for you.

Taking that a step further, you should also analyze what works *ON* you.

The last few days we've been talking about advertising. I don't believe print ads work. I'm in the minority here, considering advertising is a 200 billion dollar a year business.

I base my opinion on a simple fact: I've never bought a book based on a print ad. Or a radio or TV ad.

Then I decided to figure out why I do buy books. I read all of the mystery zines (and their ads) along with the NYTBR, among other publications. I also get a lot of books free.

I might not be the average consumer, because I spend a lot of time in bookstores, and because I'm in the business. But I am still a fan, and I still buy books, and something must influence by buying.

Here are the last ten books I've bought, how I heard of them, and what led me to buy them:

Hannibal Rising by Thomas Harris

How I heard about it: I read Red Dragon as a youngster, because my mother had a copy and said she liked it. I read Silence when it came out and I knew about it because it was reviewed in a magazine I read (a British zine called FEAR.) I knew about Hannibal because I'd been watching for it for 13 years. I knew about Hannibal Rising through Publisher's Lunch and PW Weekly, which I get in my email.

Why I bought it: I hated Hannibal, and hoped this one would be better.

Where I bought it: At Waldenbooks on the day it came out.

Mephisto Club by Tess Gerritsen

How I heard about it: After reading Silence of the Lambs, I picked up every book about serial killers that I saw. I found The Surgeon while browsing the mystery isle at my local bookstore. I was hooked, and became a regular reader.

Why I bought it: Rizzoli and Isles haven't disappointed me yet, so I keep buying the books. Plus I owe Tess forever because she blurbed me. Plus I consider her a friend.

Where I bought it: At Waldenbooks the day it came out. I also bought a copy for my wife, since she didn't want to share my copy and read it second.

Dark Gold by David Angsten

How I heard about it: I moderated a panel at Midwest Lit Festival that David was on.

Why I bought it: I like underwater monster stories, and have since I read Jaws (which my mother recommended when I was young.) But the real reason I forked over the money was because David bought a copy of Rusty Nail first.

Where I bought it: At the Midwest Lit festival, at the after-party.

Marley & Me by John Grogan

How I heard about it: Seeing it on the new release table at a Borders I was signing at. Then I saw it mentioned in PW Weekly and PM.

Why I bought it: My wife is a professional pet sitter and loves dogs. Seemed like a good gift.

Where I bought it: The next bookstore I went to —I didn't make a special trip.

The 2007 Guinness Book of World Records

How I heard about it: I read these as a child. I found one in a thrift shop for a quarter. I saw the new edition at a bookstore on the front table.

Why I bought it: For my nine year old. I thought he'd like it as much as I did as a child.

Where I bought it: A Borders, during a drop in signing —an impulse buy.

Twelve Sharp by Janet Evanovich

How I heard about it: I knew Janet did a Plum book a year. I'd never read Evanovich before (even though people compared me to her) and I learned about the series through fans.

Why I bought it: I was invited to submit an essay to an upcoming book about Stephanie Plum, so I read the whole series, including this one.

Where I bought it: At Waldenbooks, the day it came out (the essay was due that week.)

Survivor by JF Gonzalez

How I heard about it: A bookseller told me about it.

Why I bought it: The same bookseller highly recommended it, saying he was more warped than I am.

Where I bought it: Directly from above mentioned bookseller.

Book of the Dead by Preston and Child

How I heard about it: I worked at Crown Books years ago, and we got an ARC of The Relic. I loved it, and handsold the hell out of that book. Have been a fan ever since. I knew about BOTD by keeping an eye on their website.

Why I bought it: Preston and Child have never disappointed.

Where I bought it: Barnes and Noble, the day it came out.

Paint Shop Pro 8 for Dummies

How I heard about it: Seeing it at Borders in the computer isle.

Why I bought it: I was specifically looking for a book about PSP8. I've been familiar with the Dummies books for years, having bought a few when I first got a computer. I like their layout. I compared several other books to this one before buying, but decided on this one after 20 minutes of browsing.

Where I bought it: I went to Borders for a PSP8 book, and left with one.

Rain Fall by Barry Eisler

How I heard about it: I met Barry at a convention years ago, and we became friends. I know his work well.

Why I bought it: I was out with a buddy, and I made him come into a bookstore with me so I could do a drop in signing. As I was leaving, I saw a Rain Fall hardcover in the bargain bin (sorry Barry!). I bought it and gave it to my friend, telling him it kicks ass.

Where I bought it: The store I signed at. It was an impulse gift.

Conclusions

- Three of these purchases were series I already follow.
- One was work-related.
- Two were gifts of books I've read before.

- One was a gift that related to my wife's job.
- One was a bookseller recommendation.
- One was because I met the author.
- One was because I needed a PSP manual.

None were because I saw ads. And since I read Mystery Scene, Deadly Pleasures, EQMM, AHMM, Crimespree, PW, Library Journal, BookPage, Kirkus, and the NYTBR, I see PLENTY of ads. I also see them in conference booklets, and I went to many cons this year.

Now perhaps I'm an atypical book buyer. But as I've said many times before, I do what works for me and on me.

I've bought dozens of books because I've met the author, and dozens more because booksellers or friends recommended them. Many of the books I buy are books I buy intentionally —I go to the store for a specific title. I've bought books in the past by browsing, and I've bought books as gifts and as impulse purchases.

But I've never bought a book, or even been made aware of a book, from a print ad.

As I've mentioned in the threads: ads that announce a book to an already established readership do work, even though they aren't the most cost-effective form of announcing (hell, any fan of Evanovich or Preston and Child or Gerritsen knows to watch their websites and Amazon for release dates or go to the bookstore and ask "When's the next one coming out?")

I've also mentioned that simply being aware of an author's name doesn't mean much. I know hundreds of author's names. That doesn't mean I buy their books.

But that's me. How about you?

List the last few books you've bought, and how you heard of them. Tell me if print ads for books played a part.

What made you aware of a book, and then what made you buy it? Did you make a special trip to the store? Did you use Amazon? Was it an impulse purchase? A gift? A recommendation? Did you know of the author beforehand?

Spill. Show me why you buy.

72 comments

Are Awards Their Own Reward?

All of the arts have awards, and writing has more than its share. The Pulitzer and Nobel Prize are the most well-known, and then the Booker Prize and the National Book Award. Organizations give awards, conferences give awards, and they can be judged by peers or by fans.

There's something exciting about being nominated. It not only reinforces an artist's efforts and intentions, but this type of recognition can lead to more publicity and exposure, increased book sales, and it makes the publisher happy.

But I don't believe it ultimately makes the writer happy.

In the mystery, thriller, and horror genres, there are about a dozen or so highly regarded and sought-after awards. They include the Edgar, Anthony, Macavity, Dilly, Gumshoe, Derringer, Raven, Ellery Queen Reader's Choice Award, Stoker, Barry, Thriller, Shamus, Dagger, Nero Wolf, Love is Murder, and others.

I've been nominated for several of these. And I've won a few.

Sometimes you get nominated by your writing peers or fans. Sometimes you get nominated by submitting your stories and books yourself. Sometimes your editors will submit your work.

For a few recent awards, neither my publisher nor I have submitted my work to the judges for consideration. This is at my request.

While I feel honored to get on final ballots, and while I feel very grateful when I win, I've found that my feelings tend to be even more pronounced when I don't get nominated, or if I'm nominated and then I lose.

The highs don't make up for the lows.

It gets even more complicated. At the conference I attended over the weekend, I won an award, and I felt bad about winning. It's not that I don't appreciate it —-I'm deeply honored. But I looked at the folks who didn't win and felt terrible for them.

Anyone who knows about my many rejections knows I'm an expert at having my hopes crushed. And I hate to see it happen to other writers almost as much as I hate to have it happen to myself.

The ultimate value of an award remains elusive. Letting a handful of judges with various tastes judge the merit of one's work may say more about the judges than the work. Nepotism and popularity often come into play while voting. Personal opinion plays a large part. And the self-congratulatory and semi-incestuous nature of some awards and awards committees tends to exclude the deserving (if there is such a thing), and embrace the familiar.

Looking at past winners in the above categories reveals two truths. A small percentage of popular authors keep being nominated for awards, and many of them keep winning. These authors are usually bestsellers. But the larger percentage of winners and nominees don't ever achieve bestsellerdom.

And many bestsellers never get nominated for awards, which really makes my wonder.

I don't believe that winning an award is a good indicator of future sales, or even a good indicator that the work is truly the best that genre has to offer.

Art is subjective, and I often read books that I believe are much better than the award-winners, yet were never nominated.

As any psychologist can tell you, allowing your happiness to be dependent on what a group of people dictate is not in your best interest.

What if you win an award one year, then lose the next year? What does that tell you about your work?

What if you get nominated year after year, but never win? Or what if you never get nominated?

The system breeds more stress and disappointment and frustration than it does happiness.

So, if I have a choice in the matter, I don't put my work up for award consideration.

Sour grapes on my part? I don't think so. I'm just trying to protect myself from a situation that I have no control over. I can influence my sales, and that leads directly to money in my pocket. I can't influence the awards I win and lose, and that leads directly to ulcers.

That said, for the 2005 Edgar Awards best novel, I'm pulling for VANISH by **Tess Gerritsen**. It's about time the Edgar committee realized what the rest of us have known for years —-she's one of the best in the biz.

23 comments

Business Cards and Computer Savvy

When I sign copies of my books, either for a fan or for a bookstore, I stick a business card between the pages to subtly remind the buyer about my other titles.

Writers should have two, or more, card designs.

The first should be a contact card, with your address and phone number(s), to give to media and people who need to get in touch.

The second (third, fourth, fifth...) should be a sales card. This has your book cover on the front, and the back can contain a blurb or two, your website URL (and possibly email address), and whatever little teaser or picture you can fit in the small space. This is the one I stick in books. Not only does it give the reader something portable to take to the bookstore with them (in order to remember the titles), but it also functions as a bookmark.

In the beginning, I made my own business cards on the computer using a program called Business Card Designer Plus. You upload your own jpg, add the various data, and print them on an inkjet or color laser printer.

The result is a so-so card. Single sided, not the highest quality cardstock. Not professional, but much cheaper than full color runs at Kinkos or Office Max.

When Bloody Mary came out, my publisher began to make business cards for me. These are always full color, double sided, slick and glossy.

I give cards to everyone, all the time. I drop them in books, my outgoing mail, on the table at restaurants, to people I meet outside the publishing biz —-I basically am trying to give a card to every single person on the planet.

If business cards aren't something your publisher provides, and you don't want to go into debt buying ink cartridges, you should check out www.overnightprints.com.

You design your business card using Photoshop or any other picture editing program (I'm partial to Paintshop Pro 8) and then upload it to the URL.

Did I lose anybody when talking about the do-it-yourself option? If so, you might want to consider joining the 21st century.

For the first time in human history, amateur technology is on par with professional technology, and much more affordable.

You can take high rez pictures, design your own website, and make your own promo materials. When someone needs a headshot, or a book cover jpg, you can send these on your own, without having to go through your publisher. You can update your home page yourself. You can create business cards, chap books, and flyers without hiring experts.

Doing it yourself is faster, and cheaper. In my opinion, here's the least a writer needs to learn:

- A photo editing program. The ability to save, retouch, resize, and alter jpgs, gifs, pngs and other picture files. People request these all the time.
- A web design program. Your URL is your home. Learn how to take care of it.
- Some basic HTML knowledge. Even if you're able to use a web design program like Frontpage or Dreamweaver, you still need to know your hrefs from your img srcs.

Other things techno savvy authors can do:

- Learn Adobe Acrobat, for making pdf files. These can be used as **website downloads** and press releases, among other things.
- Use a mailing list organizer, for sending out newsletters.
- Use a GPS, for finding bookstores while touring.
- Use a digital camera.
- Use a laptop or some other way of accessing email on the road.
- Learn audio editing software for podcasting.
- Learn an ftp program, so you can upload and download large files.
- Understand the potential of MS Word or Wordperfect, for making documents beyond simple manuscripts.

Every so often, while discussing this stuff with my peers, a writer will ask me, "You do that yourself? Why don't you hire someone?"

I'm not against hiring pros. Pros are pros for a reason, and are often worth what they cost.

But I do believe that we should all learn as much as we can. The more you know, the better off you are.

Technology isn't going away. It's going to keep advancing. You should advance along with it.

25 comments

The Moderator's Manifesto: How To Moderate A Great Panel

by Barry Eisler

What It's All About

Relax. Being a good moderator is easy. All you need to do is use a little common sense and avoid a few common mistakes.

Start by understanding your role. Your job as moderator is to help the panelists entertain and inform the audience. This document will teach you how.

Preparation

1. Do Your Homework. You needn't have read all the panelists' books to moderate their panel (although reading the actual books is of course ideal). But if you haven't read their books, you will need to spend some time on their websites, reading reviews, reading sample chapters, and otherwise getting to know their work so you can ask intelligent questions (even if you have read their books, you should visit their websites. You're likely to find additional interesting information there). This preparation should take at least several hours. If you don't want to invest that effort, don't be a moderator.

Prepare a list of scintillating questions for your panelists. Here, "scintillating" means questions that are specifically tied to the panelists work - questions that are varied, insightful, and provocative (hint: "Where do you get your ideas?" without more is not scintillating. Nor is asking the same question of each panelist four times in a row.).

Prepare more questions than you think you'll need. This way, if one line of questions isn't working, you can move on to something else.

2. Contact Your Panelists Beforehand. Let your panelists know what to expect from you, and what you expect from them (hint: a lot of those expectations are outlined in this Manifesto). Ask what they would like to talk about (but it's usually best not to tell them what your specific questions will be beforehand because too much panelist preparation spoils spontaneity). For example: which of their books they think you should read or at least read about? What were some of the best and worse experiences they've recently had on panels? What did they like style-wise in the past; what didn't they like? What do they like and not like about the topic assigned?

The panelists' feedback will give you good ideas, and will also communicate to them that you're serious about your role and committed to making them look good.

An unfortunate custom has developed wherein panelists bring their books to panels and stand them up on the table for the audience to see. Most times, this odd gambit fails: the audience can't see the book well anyway, but the book does serve to block the audience's view of the panelist's face. Encourage those

panelists who insist on bringing books to leave them lying down on the table and to pick them up and wave them around only once (if they must).

If possible, get together before the panel, at least briefly, so everyone can get to know each other a little and the ice gets broken before you're in front of an audience.

3. Go to Panels. You can't be a good moderator if you haven't watched a few good (and bad) ones in action. So go out of your way to attend some conferences in the months before your own gig. See how different people moderate. Learn what works and what doesn't. Improvisation, you'll see, rarely works. Planning and preparation do.

The Room

4. Panel Layout. The layout of the panel is important. Different moderators have different preferences, but be aware of the pros and cons. If you sit in the middle, it gives you equal access to the panelists left and right, but splits the panel in half and makes it harder for the panelists to interact. It also tends to make you the center of attention, which you shouldn't be. Consider sitting on one side of the panel. Some people even like to stand off to the side or wander, talk show host style (there's a reason talk show hosts do it this way). If you can, consider arranging the panelist table into a V shape so the panelists can see each other better than they will if they're arranged in a straight line.

5. Lighting and Temperature. Also pay attention to the room's lighting and temperature. Is the lighting too dim, especially early in the morning or right after lunch? Get those lights turned up. Is the room too warm? Find someone who can turn up the air conditioning (unless it's really frigid, you needn't worry about things being too cold. Cold keeps people alert; heat makes them drowsy).

6. Bonus Points. Make sure your panelists have water. This might mean clearing and replacing the used glasses from the previous panel. Your panelists will appreciate it.

If the room is too big, encourage the audience to sit towards the front, or in the center. People will comply, and the atmosphere will be better because of your efforts. Don't be afraid to do this: audiences like their moderators friendly and confident.

Hint: to take care of these matters, you'll need to arrive at your room early.

Showtime

7. Who Are You? Start by BRIEFLY introducing yourself. Just tell the audience the minimum it needs for it to know why you're moderating this panel. "Hello everyone, welcome to The Bad Guy as Hero. My name is Jane Smith, and I write a thriller series about a contract killer named Joe Killjoy. Killjoy certainly qualifies as a bad guy hero, and that's why I'm moderating today."

8. Don't Do Introductions. Or rather, don't do them AS introductions. Introductions are to moderating what exposition is to novels: necessary information that, if presented straightforwardly, is invariably boring.

Instead, weave your introduction into your questions: "Lee Child, you write a series about an ex-military cop named Jack Reacher who's got terrific investigative skills. He uses those skills to solve problems, which sounds like a formula for mystery. And yet your books read more like thrillers. How do you see your books? Are they mysteries, thrillers, or both?" (This was in fact David Montgomery's introductory question on the thriller panel at Bouchercon 2005).

At the outset, look around to ensure the audience can hear. If at any time you have doubts, ask, "Can everyone hear?" Get your panelists to talk closer to the mike if it's necessary. It often is. And it might be necessary for you, too.

9. Depart from Your Script. Realize your script, your prepared questions, is only a guideline. Ideally, your questions will provoke the panelists to riff on each other's responses. When this happens, you won't have time to get to all the questions you prepared. Recognize that this is a good thing. Forget the prepared questions and use the material that emerges during the panel to get the panelists to interact.

Interject if a panelist is faltering. Fade into the background when the panel is humming along without you. THE PANEL IS ABOUT THE PANELISTS, NOT ABOUT THE MODERATOR. That's why it's called a panel.

Some panelists are Chatty Kathies; others are shrinking violets. Intervene as necessary to ensure the panelists are getting equal airtime.

Pay attention to the audience throughout. Learn to look for glazed eyes, stupefied expressions, nodding heads, fidgety bottoms, and bodies heading for the exits. Adjust your approach if the one you're using isn't working.

If you've been blessed with good comic timing, by all means use it. An audience enjoys nothing more than a laugh. But remember to use your wit in the service of the panel (hint: if your comedy routine is pre-scripted, it will probably bomb. If you're riffing on material that arises spontaneously during the course of the panel, you're probably doing it right). If you forget that, you won't be funny, you'll be foolish.

10. Be Professional. You're going to be up there in front of a room full of people. It won't hurt to dress well and to take care of any necessary grooming. The audience will interpret your squared-away appearance as a sign of respect. The opposite is also true.

Even if you can't stop yourself from using "like" and "you know" in conversation, find a way to not use them when speaking in public. There's no excuse for imprecision when you're moderating, and besides, do you really want to sound like that when you're, you know, in front of, like, 500 people?

11. Questions From The Audience. Remember to leave time for questions from the audience. If you're in a big room, not everyone will hear the questions when they're asked, so remember to repeat them. If an audience member starts to drone on, politely interrupt and ask him or her to state a question. Don't be afraid to restate for brevity and clarity. If an audience member asks a question that's overly specific to a single panelist or otherwise not particularly relevant to the concerns of the wider audience, don't be afraid to say,

"That's an interesting question, and perhaps better addressed in depth by Panelist A after the wider Q&A we're doing now." Warn the audience of these ground rules before you start taking questions and things will go more smoothly.

A small thing: when repeating a question, it's more polite, and sounds more professional, to say, "The question is…" than it is to use a pronoun, such as, "He asked…".

Audience Q&A is important and, when done well, can give the audience a lot of satisfaction. But remember: even during the Q&A, it's still your job to moderate.

Follow-up

12. One More Round of Emails. When it's over, write your panelists and thank them for doing such a great job. Ask them if there was anything they would have liked you to do differently so you can do a better job next time.

Final Thoughts

By now, you should understand that you cannot simultaneously be a moderator and a panelist. If you want to be a panelist, don't agree to be a moderator.

If you know you're shy or don't present well or are otherwise not going to do a good job, don't take the gig. It's not fair to the audience, to the panelists, or to you. There's no shame in declining, only in doing a poor job.

But here's the great news: if you do a terrific job as moderator by bringing out the best in the panelists, the audience will appreciate you. They'll remember your name and buy your books. Being a moderator is actually a great sales opportunity - but only if you do it right.

THIS DOCUMENT GREW (AND GREW AND GREW) OUT OF A SERIES OF SOBER DISCUSSIONS AND DRUNKEN RANTS AT BOUCHERCON 2005. ITS AUTHORS ARE DONNA ANDREWS, ROBIN BURCELL, DANA CAMERON, JUDY CLEMENS, REED COLEMAN, BARRY EISLER, BILL FITZHUGH, JON JORDAN, RUTH JORDAN, LAURA LIPPMAN, DAVID MONTGOMERY, AND MJ ROSE. PLEASE POST IT, FORWARD IT, AND OTHERWISE DISSEMINATE IT TO ANYONE YOU THINK WOULD BENEFIT. THANK YOU.

Conference Tips

Bouchercon is this weekend in Madison. It's the biggest gathering of mystery writers and fans of the year.

If you are a writer attending for the first time, you might be wondering what to expect. Or, more to the point, what not to expect. Here's the quick and dirty version:

- Don't expect to be recognized. Readers don't normally put names to faces, unless you're already famous.
- Don't expect to sell a lot of books. Even bestsellers don't move huge numbers at events like this.
- Don't expect anyone to attend your panel to see you. People go to panels based on the topic and the star power. If you're reading this blog, I'm guessing you don't have the star power.
- Do expect to introduce yourself to as many people as you can. Sit next to strangers at lunch, shake hands, make a good impression. That's the reason you're there, not to drink with your friends.
- Do expect to schmooze the booksellers. If they don't carry your books, offer them some to sell at a discount (you travel with a box of your books, don't you?)
- Don't expect to get any writing done.
- Don't expect this to be worth your time and money. At least, tangibly. It will be fun and exciting, and at the same time sobering and ego-crushing. There are a lot of authors more popular than you are. Remember that you're not here as a salesperson. You're here as an ambassador. Radiate confidence. Spread good cheer. What you do here today may not pay off today, but it may pay off in 2009.

Many writers have a checklist of things they need to bring along. After doing a lot of these conferences, my checklist has narrowed considerably. I have some sort of give-away like flyers or coasters, business cards, and extra books in case the booksellers run out.

Many writers also fear public speaking, and do waaaay too much worrying and fretting and preparing for panels. If you're one of those kind of writers, here's a quick tutorial:

I've been to a lot of conventions, and I've been on a lot of panels. I've seen writers excel at their panel gigs, and I've seen writers fail miserably. A panel is a valuable opportunity to shine. Giving good panel will help fans remember you and your brand, which will lead to selling books. **Barry Eisler** has some guidelines for moderating panels, and I agree with his points. Many of these apply to being a panelist as well, but not all of them.

Here then is a Panelist's manifesto.

1. Be able to describe your book or series in 20 seconds or less. Whatever topic your panel is about, the ultimate reason you're at this conference is to self-promote. This is your chance to pitch the book to potential readers. Here's my pitch:

"My name is JA Konrath, and I write the Lt. Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels thriller series. The books are scary, like James Patterson and Patricia Cornwell, but funny like Evanovich and Dave Barry."

That's all you need. More than that, you'll lose your audience.

2. Once you've pitched your book, stop pitching your book. After you do your 20 second sound byte, stop trying to sell. Your job is to be entertaining. Focus on that. If a question directly pertains to one of your books, that's fine. If you want to make a point using one of your books, that's fine. But less is more. If you ramble too much about your books, the audience will lose interest.

3. Be funny. If you can't be funny, be brief. Studies have shown that if you can't get to the point in ten seconds, you've already lost your audience. (These studies were conducted by me, watching innumerable panels.)

The audience is interested in your answers, but only if those answers are entertaining. When you're on a panel, you're on stage. That means you're meant to perform. If you don't do well in front of an audience, let brevity be the true essence of wit.

4. About that brevity thing. Sometimes your answers may tend to run long. Try to curtail this. You think you're more interesting than you actually are. There can be anywhere from three to ten other panelists, and they all deserve equal time —-don't infringe upon theirs.

5. Speak like a professional. Make sure you're loud enough so everyone can hear you. Avoid speech hesitations like *um, ah,* and *uh.* Sit up straight. Make eye contact with as many people in the audience as you can. Smile. Laugh. You should only speak if you have something to enhance the conversation. Many writers feel they have to get "their time in." If that time is boring, they're doing more harm than good.

6. Engage the audience. Public speaking isn't a monologue; it's a dialog where half of the conversation (the audience) isn't very vocal. But give and take is happening.

You want your audience to be responsive, to show their interest through body language. Do the people look bored? Get them to pay attention. Is someone burning to ask a question? Stop talking and let them ask it. Pay attention to their reactions and responses. Your responses won't be remembered, but your enthusiasm will be.

Be confidant, not cocky. Never talk down to an audience; always assume they are smarter than you are. Before a panel, I try to shake the hand of everyone in the audience, and hand out a signed coaster. This gets them on my side before I say word one.

7. Look professional. Dress for success. Appearance means a lot. Business casual or nicer. Pay attention to how you're sitting, and what you're doing, the entire time you're on the panel, even if you're not the one speaking. No eating, chewing gum, picking your fingernails, drinking anything other than bottled water.

8. Know the topic, don't read the topic. You will be asked to appear on panels that have nothing to do with your books. This happens. When it does, you need to prepare beforehand and make sure you have something interesting to say about this topic. But DO NOT READ YOUR ANSWER!

It's okay to have notes, but once you start speaking, you must never refer to those notes. Reading is not engaging. Glancing down at a piece of paper is distracting to the audience.

9. Talk when you need to talk, but otherwise wait your turn. When the moderator, a panelist, or an audience member asks you something, you should always respond, but the length of the response should depend on if you truly have something to say about the topic. Just because you have the chance to speak does not mean you should speak.

Passing off questions to other people on the panel who might be better suited to answer them is a classy move. Interrupting other panelists constantly with your monologues is bad bad bad.
10. Interrupt when needed. Sometimes a panelist is monopolizing the panel, and the moderator isn't doing anything about it. Sometimes someone says something that screams for a response or a joke. Remember why you're there: to entertain. If you have a joke, say it. If you disagree with someone, start a polite argument then and there. It makes panels more interesting, and more fun.

Lee Goldberg is brilliant with one liners, and he always makes the panel fun. **David Morrell** isn't afraid to disagree with his fellow panelists, and this always makes the discussion more entertaining and exciting.

11. Help the moderator. Sometimes your moderator will suck. If the ship is sinking because the captain is incompetent, do something or you'll go down with the ship. Start asking questions of your fellow panelists, or of the audience. Interrupt the moderator if she's talking too much about herself, reading bios or questions, seems ill-prepared, can't keep the discussion going, or is otherwise crashing and burning.

Also, if the moderator doesn't say anything about herself (when I moderate, I rarely even introduce myself) it's a classy move to ask the moderator some occasional questions. If another panelist isn't getting a chance to speak, ask her questions to get her to speak. If another panelist is rambling, stop it somehow.

12. Bring copy of your book with you. Many in the audience won't know you, or your books. Having your book next to you will help them find it when they're back in the dealer room. It's subtle, subconscious brand reinforcement, and it links your face to your cover. Some authors don't do this, because they don't like how it looks. My rule of thumb is: If at least one other author has their book propped up, you should too. But you don't want to be the only one with a book, because that looks needy. Consequently, being the only one without a book looks forgetful.

13. Stick around. If you did well, people will approach you after the panel has ended. They'll ask follow-up questions, bring you things to sign, or just want to shake your hand and tell you how much they enjoyed it. Bask in this, and thank them for coming. Also thank the moderator if they did a good job.

14. Get feedback. The best way to know how you did is to watch a videotape of it. You can learn a lot watching yourself. The next best way is to ask a member of the audience whom you trust. Ask how you could improve. Don't settle for less than the truth. We learn from criticism, not praise.

Remember that facts and opinions aren't interesting. Personality, humor, and conflicts are interesting. You're there to sell, but you shouldn't be selling, you should be entertaining. And if you're entertaining, you'll wind up selling.

See you in Madison!

10 comments

Conferences

Last weekend I attended Bouchercon, and hung out with peers and fans. I had more fun this year than any other, because I was less focused on making an impression and more focused on simply being a nice guy. That meant taking the time to meet new people, reconnect with old friends, and basically smile and nod a lot.

I wasn't on any of the big panels in the big rooms, so my crowd was smaller and mostly made up of newbie writers. This meant I didn't win over new fans with my clever banter who then ran to the dealer room to buy my books. (At conferences, the size of your panel audience is usually proportional to the number of books you sell.) Instead, a lot of newbies cornered me for advice or praise or to ask me to look at their query letter. I'm fine with that.

I heard a lot of folks talking about my 500 bookstore tour, which made me blush. Over the weekend dozens of people came up to me, to offer congratulations, ask questions, or just meet me in person. I managed to sign for a solid 40 minutes at my autographing session, which was nice.

For the very first time at a conference, I felt as if all the hard work building a brand and establishing name recognition might be actually paying off.

Which means now it's time to quit them for a while.

Writing conventions are essential for newbie authors. Go to as many as you can afford, meet as many people as possible, network and schmooze and act like a writer, no matter how published or unpublished you are.

But eventually there comes a saturation point. Instead of your presence being a surprise, it has become expected. The cost of attending, both in time and money, may no longer be worthwhile. You see the same 800 people year after year. You wind up partying with the same two dozen of them. Bouchercon for me has become less about selling books and more about reconnecting with old friends.

If I were rich and famous, I'd treat it like a holiday and have huge parties like the always charming **Lee Child**, inviting everyone and footing the bill. Lee doesn't come to sell books. He comes to be available to his fans. (Thanks, Lee!)

I'm not nearly at his level. I'm a midlist author on a budget, and I could be doing other things to further my career. Less expensive things.

I don't want to be thought of as overexposed. I might even benefit from people saying "Where's Konrath?" rather than "There's Konrath." There is a value in being missed.

So unless my publisher asks me to go, or unless the conference organizers decide they must have me as a speaker and offer to pay my way, I'm going to take a year off from conferences.

Is that stupid? Crazy? The antithesis of everything I'm all about?

I don't think so. I believe both my career, and the conference world, can manage a year without me. And the several thousand bucks I spend every year on travel, conference fees, hotels, and food, could be put to different use.

Of course, nothing is set in stone. If I become rich within the next twelve months, you're all invited to the huge party I'm throwing at next years' Bouchercon. Especially that Child guy. I owe him *a lot* of beer.

18 comments

Faking Confidence

Just got back from Sleuthfest, and attended a session where a panelist said this to folks in attendance:

"You aren't the audience for this book."

Now, in deference to the guy, maybe he was right. But if he was, why was he speaking on a panel to those people? And why was he at Sleuthfest to begin with, since he seemed intent on making sure he didn't sell a single book?

We all have lapses in confidence. It's human. But if you want to have a writing career, DON'T SHOW WEAKNESS IN PUBLIC.

Charlie Brown isn't a good marketer. Sure, we can all identify with being the loser. Especially if we're at a signing and only one person shows up, or if we get dropped by our publisher, or if we don't win that big award we were nominated for, et cetera ad nauseum. Writers are magnets for bad luck. And publicly denigrating ourselves may get us a measure of sympathy.

Unfortunately, sympathy doesn't sell books. Stephen King is not a bestseller because people feel sorry for him. King is a winner. Winners tend to keep winning. He knows it, and the world agrees.

The secret to being a winner is confidence. Since most of us lack in this department, being sensitive artist types, we have to learn to fake confidence. How do you fake it? Here's how:

1. Smile. A smile shows you're happy to be there, secure in your place, and receptive to your audience, whether it's a room full of fans or a guy standing next to you in an elevator.

2. Be positive. Optimism is sexy, and it's contagious. No one likes to be around a downer. Don't let anything negative escape your lips.

3. Like your books. Think about the enthusiasm you have when you see a great movie and you're telling a friend about it. Tone that down just a touch, and talk about your books in the same way. If you aren't excited about what you write, why the hell are you a writer?

4. Dress for success. The more comfortable you are about your appearance, the better you feel about yourself. This translates into better verbal and non-verbal communication.

5. Laugh. Laugh early, laugh often. It puts people at ease, and attracts them to you.

6. Listen. The best conversations you'll ever have are the ones where you talk the least.

7. Focus on success. You'll fail sometimes. We all do. But if you focus on the good things that happen, and push down the bad, you'll be perceived as a winner. Perception equals reality.

Don't be cocky. Don't be pushy. Don't be overbearing. Just be confident. If you aren't 100% sure that people will like your books, don't speak in public about them —you're only doing yourself a disservice.

12 comments

Ants and Grasshoppers

Last week I got eighty-five emails from people I've never corresponded with before. Strangers to me. However, I wasn't a stranger to them.

These people found me. They found me, and thought enough of me to write to me. Some wrote to say thanks for my website and blog, which has a lot of info for writers. Some wrote to say they like my books. Some wrote to say they appreciated an article I recently did for Writer's Digest. Some wrote to ask for advice. Some wrote to exchange links, or to tell me they've already linked to me. Some wrote to ask me to be their friends on MySpace, Quechup, or Crimespace.

They found me by searching online, by reading my books or short stories or articles, by following links from other sites, or by having people tell them about me. **Google Alerts** has also informed me that 27 sites have mentioned me and/or linked to me in the past week, and my website and blog have had over 5000 unique hits since last Sunday.

And what have I done in the past week to garner all of this attention?

Nothing. Nada. Zip. Zilch. Buttkiss. I sat on my ass and reorganized my iTunes library. ID4 tags suck.

Of course, the lesson to be learned here *isn't* that doing nothing will make people seek you out.

The lesson is that if you work hard establishing a brand and spreading name-recognition, then you don't have to work 24/7, because the machinery is already in place to do it for you.

Consider the old parable of the ant and the grasshopper.

The grasshopper believed that all he had to do was write a good book, and his future was assured.

The ant knew that writing a good book was only the beginning, and he had to make sure people knew about his book by building a brand and spreading name-recognition.

Smart ant.

ESTABLISHING A BRAND

Naturally, your writing is a big part of your brand. What you write is going to attract a certain audience. You should know this audience. You should like this audience. You should be a part of this audience.

But your brand is more than just your writing. It's your personality. Your expertise. Your persona. It's what makes you special, and what makes others want to seek you out.

Remember that no one can look for you if they don't know you exist. So a large part of your brand is aligning yourself with something that people do seek out, so when they look for it they will find you.

What about you and your work is interesting? Unique? Similar? Important to others?

Think about it. Think long and hard. Anyone can find you by Googling you. You need to make them find you when they're looking for something else.
But before you go searching for people, you have to create something that they want.

If all you have to offer is a book, which costs money, it's doubtful you'll ever have a big web presence. A certain number of people on the Internet may be looking for books, but the majority of them are looking for two things: **Information** and **Entertainment.**

If your blog is only relevant to a few close friends, and your website is only a big advertisement for your writing, why should strangers bother visiting either, let alone link to you?

Your main goal, if you want people to discover you, is to entertain and inform them.

Your Internet presence isn't about what you have to sell. It's what you have to offer, usually for free.

What are you offering? What on your website will make a surfer stay for longer than ten minutes? What on your blog will make it relevant in five years?

Just being a published writer isn't enough. Nobody cares that you're published. Nobody cares that you have a book for sale.

What do they care about?

Camaraderie. Offer people a place where they can be in touch with you, and with others. There have been close to 300 posts on A Newbie's Guide to Publishing. But there have been almost 10,000 comments. If the users generate the content, they'll return.

Expertise. By consistently putting relevant information on your sites, the search engines will keep ranking you higher and linking to more of your pages. People will also link to you, and recommend you to others. They'll also seek you out for real life appearances, speeches, and signings.

Entertainment. Guess what? Your three sample chapters and two paragraph author bio aren't enough to keep the average surfer interested for more than a few minutes, if they even find your site. And I don't believe that Flash animation, cool music, or games and videos will either.

Give surfers enough information about you and your work, presented in a fun way, to make them like you as well as your writing. Your website isn't an ad. It's not an appetizer either. It should be a fun place to go even if you weren't pimping your books.

This is also important when speaking in front of people. When you are giving a speech, doing a panel, or attending a signing, you are an entertainer. That means you must be entertaining. That means learn how.

Freshness. Make sure you add, update, and change your sites often, so people come back. Make sure you stay in touch with those who get in touch with you. Reward those that keep coming back.

Real Life Relevance. You're a writer, so chances are you're on the Internet constantly. The average person isn't, and doesn't put as much value or importance on it as you do. Give people something they can use offline. A free short story or book they can print up. Audio or podcasts they can download and take with them. Contests to participate in and newsletters to sign up for that result in stuff sent snail mail. An email from an author is nice. A real life handshake and a smile is even better.

SPREADING BRAND-RECOGNITION

Once you've established your brand, the hard part begins. No one is going to magically discover you just because you've got a cool website or a great novel. Sure, some writers get lucky with a huge marketing campaign. The rest of us have to seek out readers in order to make them aware that we exist.

On the Internet

You already know your demographic, and who your readers are, because you've spent a long time thinking about it. Now you need to go out and draw them to you. Here's how.

Find Websites. Look for websites, bulletin boards, Yahoo groups, blogs, listservs, message boards, and forums where people who like your books would visit.

Offer Links. Exchange links with those sites. Or link to them and write about them, so when people are searching for *that* site they'll find *your* site.

Participate. Be a human being, not a salesperson. I never seek out MySpace Friends by saying "I'm an author, read my books." I send them invitations and a message saying that I looked at their page and enjoy the same authors they do. After a few back and forth exchanges, 95% of them figure out I'm an author too, and many of them go on to read my books and are glad I contacted them, rather than annoyed at me spamming them.

Remember what people care about: Camaraderie, Entertainment, Expertise, Freshness, and Real Life Relevance. When dealing with people, low key flattery works better than bragging, listening is more attractive than talking, and being likable will sell more books than actively trying to sell books.

Revisit, Revamp, Repeat. Too many writers quit their blog after a year. They don't update their sites. They don't check in with their old web haunts. They don't seek out new haunts. They reach a point and simply stop.

You shouldn't ever stop making your Internet presence larger. And I don't mean commenting on the same six blogs you do every day. I mean searching for new sites and new people, going back to sites you haven't been to in a while, and making sure your sites are worthy of the hits they're getting.

In Real Life

If the Internet is where you're doing all or most of your promotion, you're going to fail. The majority of your readers aren't on the net, and they've never visited your website.

At first, many of your readers will find you accidentally. While browsing in a bookstore, or at the library, or a garage sale. They're looking for a book, and they find yours. You have little control over this. Yet, this is how a lot of books are sold.

Others will find you through articles or reviews written about you in the newspaper. You can spend big bucks on a publicist to get more reviews, or some local radio or TV spots, but I'm not convinced that those are cost-effective for new authors. The same goes with advertising. Does it work? Maybe. Is it worth the cost? For midlist authors, I don't believe so. Spending hundreds, or thousands, or tens of thousands on media attention and ads isn't as cost-effective as traveling and actually meeting the people you want to reach. Which leads us to:

Meet Your Publisher. The best money you'll ever spend is flying to NY and meeting your editor and the many folks at your publishing house and being charming. We do more for people that we like. Get them to like you.

Meet Fans. At the beginning of your writing career, meet as many readers as possible. This means going to conventions, book fairs, and conferences. Do book signings. Speak at libraries. Shake those hands. It's time consuming, and costly, but a smile and a kind word will get people to pick up your books.

Meet Booksellers. Real life is better than online. Booksellers have influence and power. They can handsell you. They help spread the almighty word-of-mouth that all authors need to succeed.

Sell Stories and Articles. I've got a few hundred thousand books in print. But my name has been in print several million times, thanks to short stories and essays and articles I've sold to magazines and anthologies. By publishing your writing, you can reach more people in a shorter amount of time than anything you can do online. Plus, there's no greater advertisement for an author than a sample of their writing.

Enlist the Media. You don't need a publicist to get you featured in the local paper. You just need to write a press release, making sure it has a hook and enough spin to interest them. You can contact reviewers, and radio stations, and local TV, and do it for free.

Enlist Your Peers. We're not in competition with each other. Someone can buy both my book and your book. So it makes sense to help your fellow writers. Pool information and resources. Trade contacts. Rather than sing your own praises, sing their praises, and they'll probably sing yours in return. I've been invited into many anthologies because I've had a beer with a fellow writer at a conference. When I'm interviewed, I mention their names. Sometimes I interview them. Sometimes they interview me. The more friends you have in this biz, the better off you are.

Of course, in both real life and online, be generous, grateful, amusing, and loyal. You are not a salesperson. You're an ambassador, representing your writing.

ANTS AND GRASSHOPPERS

Going back to the parable, the ant worked hard building a brand and establishing name-recognition, and several things happened.

1. The ant passed a tipping point. In the beginning, he sought out fans, speaking engagements, and media attention. But after a while those things came to him, in greater frequency than he could have imagined.

2. The ant realized the past continued to work for him. Booksellers he met years ago, stories he wrote for old magazines, and blog posts he penned in 2004 continued to send new fans his way.

3. The ant reached a lot of people, and those people talked about him with many others, spreading word-of-mouth and expanding his audience much further than his personal efforts.

4. The ant became a bestseller, then had a three-way with Angelina Jolie and Catherine Zeta-Jones.

And what of the blissfully ignorant grasshopper who disliked public speaking and believed that all he had to do was write good books?

He attended a single writing convention and complained the whole time, did two booksignings in his home town, and was cut by his publisher for poor sales. Then he died of cancer.

CONCLUSION

1. Figure out who your readers are.
2. Figure out what your readers want.
3. Reach out to your readers.

This will not only help you sell more books than you would otherwise, but keep this up long enough and you'll find that the longer you last, the easier it gets.

Or you can do nothing and die of Kaposi's sarcoma.

The choice is yours.

32 comments

The Art of the Soft Sell

Writers suck at selling.

It's understandable. Most writers are better at expressing themselves on paper than in person. They tend to be shy, or introverted, or lacking confidence, or even lacking basic social skills.

Put a writer in a situation where he is forced to sell the books he spent so many hours creating, and many conflicting emotions boil to the surface.

I've seen writers at booksignings, and conventions, and fairs, sitting behind stacks of their novels, and I can read their thoughts:

- ***I don't want to be here.***
- ***Why won't anyone buy anything?***
- ***This is humiliating.***
- ***This isn't why I became a writer.***
- ***Doesn't anyone know I'm here?***
- ***The organizers really screwed this event up.***
- ***Don't I have fans?***
- ***It's the publisher's job to sell books, not mine.***
- ***I'm bored.***
- ***I stink at this.***
- ***Why do people keep saying no?***
- ***I hate pimping myself.***
- ***It's the booksellers job to sell books, not mine.***
- ***I can't sell a book to save my life.***
- ***I'm petrified.***
- ***No one likes me.***
- ***I'm exhausted.***
- ***I'm not a salesman, I'm an artist.***
- ***I hate being pushy.***
- ***Why is everyone ignoring me?***
- ***If I get asked where the bathroom is one more time, I'm leaving.***

So these writers avoid doing events where they're forced to sell books. They believe they aren't good at it, and it's much easier to give up than to learn a new skill set which will help them succeed.

The fact is, pretty much anyone can handsell books. Booksignings don't have to be traumatic failures. I've blogged extensively about this before HERE, so I'm not going to repeat myself. Instead, I'm going to offer some suggestions based on things that I've learned about human nature.

Selling is Flirting

Going up to a stranger in a bar and saying, "Wanna fuck?" isn't the best strategy for success. It might work occasionally, but you'll annoy more people than you entice.

The secret to getting anyone interested in you, whether it is as a date or as a purchase, is pretty straightforward.

1. Make eye contact and smile.

The way you look and act will give people a silent signal that you're friendly and approachable. If you're well groomed and dressed, and your body language shows you're relaxed, non-threatening, and interested, then you're already halfway there.

2. Ask questions to develop a common ground.

If someone is in a bookstore, or at a writing conference, chances are they're there because they like books. There are a hundred questions you could ask, from "Enjoying the conference?" to "Do you like thrillers?" Keep asking questions until you get more than monosyllabic answers. The secret to drawing a person out is finding what they truly want to talk about. And *everyone* has something they want to talk about.

3. Sugarcoat your pitch.

The secret to selling is to make it seem like you aren't selling. No one likes being sold. Luckily, you aren't there to sell books. You're there to meet people who are actively looking for the types of books that you write. The key is to find out what they like, and make them aware your books fit the bill.

4. Make physical contact.

The easiest way to do this is to hand them a copy of the book, or hand them a flyer or bookmark. A handshake is usually welcome too. The impact of physical touch is powerful, and connects us as human beings more than anything else does.

5. Make it personal for them, but not for you.

During those seconds or minutes you're with a potential buyer, they should feel like they're the center of your universe. But because more people say no than yes, you can't actually let them be the center of your universe, because the constant rejection will tear you apart. If someone has no interest in you or your book, you can't take it personally. You also can't take it personally if someone really gets a huge thrill out of talking to you. This is a vicarious relationship, no emotional investment required or desired.

6. Learn to recognize interest.

Some (most) people don't want to be bothered with you, or your book. This doesn't mean they're horrible people, and it doesn't mean you suck. Almost every person has developed defenses to ward off annoying sales pitches. Avoiding eye contact, ignoring you, offering clipped or rude replies, sneering —-these are

all consumer equivalents to a rattlesnake shaking his tail. Let them pass and seek out someone more receptive. You're not there to waste time, yours or theirs. You're there to meet people who will love your writing. After you've shaken off the fear and tried this for a few hours, you can get pretty good at sizing up who is will give your books a shot.

How does this work in real life? Here are some pastiches drawn from the thousands of times I've done this. Each of these is 100% true.

Example #1 - The Browser

Our hero (me) is standing next to a huge pile of his books, by the front entrance of the bookstore. A man walks in, ignores me (most people do), and walks straight to the New Releases where he picks up James Patterson's latest. I walk up to him, arms at my sides, holding my newest novel.

ME: Patterson fan?

MAN: Hmm? Oh, yeah.

ME: I love the Alex Cross series. Do you have a favorite?

MAN: No, I pretty much read everything he writes.

ME: Do you like other thriller writers?

MAN: I like Tom Clancy, Clive Cussler, Lee Child.

ME: (smiling) I love Lee Child. He blurbed my second book.

MAN: You're a writer?

ME: (holding up my book) Yep. This is me. My books are a lot like Patterson's, with the action of Child. They're about a Chicago cop named Jack Daniels. Fast reads, a lot of dialog, a lot of suspense. (hands the book to the man)

MAN: Which one is the best?

ME: The latest one is the best. But it's a series, and a lot of people like to start at the beginning. It goes Whiskey Sour, Bloody Mary, Rusty Nail, Dirty Martini. You're sensing the theme.

MAN: I used to drink Rusty Nails in college.

ME: Where'd you go to school?

MAN: U of I.

ME: I used to party down at that campus, in the 90's.

MAN: (walks over tot he table, picks up Whiskey Sour) This is your first?

ME: That's it. If you're interested, I'd love to sign a copy for you.

MAN: Let's do it. (hands me the book.)

ME: Can I make it out to you?

MAN: Me. My name is Ryan.

ME: Hi, Ryan. I'm JA. (shake his hand, then sign his book "Ryan, Don't Read and Drive, JA") Thanks, Ryan. You'll like it. I promise. And since I have a character named Jack Daniels (I sign a coaster and hand it to him) it's a law that I have to give out drink coasters.

MAN: Thanks. (goes to register to buy my book, the new James Patterson forgotten)

Example #2 - The Interested Party

Our hero (me again) is at a multi-author event where we're all lined up at a table, waiting for people to approach us. Some folks do, but the majority of the customers are at the bookseller tables, or wandering the room.

I get up and walk around, introducing myself and passing out signed coasters. Then I head for the bookseller table and see a woman staring at one of my novels.

ME: I've heard that guy sucks.

WOMAN: (looks at me, then my nametag, then smiles) You're the author.

ME: (holding out hand) JA Konrath, nice to meet you. (shakes) What's your name?

WOMAN: Mary.

ME: Do you like thrillers, Mary?

WOMAN: I read a little bit of everything.

ME: Then you'll love me. My books are funny, like Janet Evanovich or Carl Hiaasen, but they also have some scary parts, like James Patterson when he wrote his own books. Who do you read?

WOMAN: I love Evanovich. My whole family loves her.

ME: Me too. I haven't read Thirteen yet, but I read the other twelve. Is it worth picking up?

WOMAN: I liked it. I laughed a lot.

ME: Does she finally choose between Ranger and Morelli?

WOMAN: No. That drives me nuts.

ME: I agree. But would you recommend it?

WOMAN: It's not as funny as some of her earlier books, but it's worth reading.

ME: My books are funnier than Janet's.

WOMAN: Really?

ME: (handing her a book) It's about a female cop named Jack Daniels. Her personal life's a train wreck, but she's really good at her job. Lot's of humor. If this book doesn't make you laugh, you can mail it back to me and I'll send you a check for seventeen thousand dollars.

WOMAN: (laughing) You sold me.

ME: Great! Can I sign a copy to Mary, or is this for someone in your family?

Example #3 - The Reluctant Fan

Our hero (moi) has just finished speaking at some event, and it went well. People laughed in the right places, and several people approach me afterward.

FAN: I love your books.

ME: Thanks!

FAN: I get them at the library.

ME: I love libraries.

FAN: I do too. But sometimes there's a waiting list. I hate waiting. When is the new one coming out in paperback?

ME: In about eleven months.

FAN: I'm a huge fan. Can you just give me a copy?

ME: I wish I could. But these books don't belong to me. Does anyone in your family like to read?

FAN: Everyone does. My mom loves your books.

ME: You could always buy the copy for her, then you can read it beforehand. Does she have a birthday coming up?

FAN: Yes. Next month.

ME: (hands over a hardcover) A personalized book makes a great gift. And you can always tell her you spent six hours in line to see me, and got the last one.

FAN: (smiling) Okay, you sold me. Her name is Andrea.

ME: With an "A"?

Example #4 - The Gawker

Our hero is in the middle of pitch, and a few folks have stopped to watch what's going on. First, I step back, inviting them into the circle. I hand each person a coaster, making eye contact without pausing in the spiel. The spiel is something along the lines of:

"I'm an author, and I write thrillers about a cop named Jack Daniels."

If the gawkers are mostly women, I mention that Jack is short for Jacqueline. If they're mostly men, I leave that part out.

"The books are laugh outloud funny. If you're drinking something while reading, it will come out your nose. But they're also scary —they'll make you lock your doors and windows. Similar to James Patterson, but with more jokes than Janet Evanovich."

I pick up some of my titles and hold them up.

"They're all named after drinks. There are four in the series so far, and a fifth is coming out next year. I'd love to sign some copies for you. They make great gifts, and great investments. After you get a signature it will sell for triple on eBay."

I hand out some books so people can take a look. A few of them ask me to sign them immediately.

Now let's see if I can anticipate the backlash to this article by placing myself in the shoes of skeptics using a whiny Q & A format.

Q: I'd never do this. I'm a writer, not a huckster like you.

A: I believe that people will enjoy my books. In order for them to do so, they first have to read them. I'm the most qualified person to make people aware of this. I also have the most vested interest in this happening.

Q: I hate sales. Salesmen are pushy, slick liars who want to take your money by preying on your insecurities and weaknesses.

A: Don't think of it as sales. Think of it as finding new fans. Which you'll do. You'll also impress the booksellers, and maybe even your publisher. And, for the record, try not to let your publisher hear your views on selling. Personally, I think sales people are the coolest folks on the planet, and I fully appreciate my reps.

Q: I couldn't do what you do.

A: Yes you could. You simply don't want to, and have made up excuses for yourself instead of trying.

Q: I've tried, and I'm no good at it.

A: Try harder. Being lazy, afraid, or embarassed isn't a good reason to quit. Failure is a learning experience. Figure out what went wrong, then try to do better next time.

Q: Maybe you should write better books, and then they'd sell without you having to do this.

A: The best written book in the world will always sell more copies if the author promotes it.

Q: How often does this work?

A: It's possible to sell dozens of books to strangers during your visit, depending on foot-traffic and length of stay. I average one book sold for every eight people I approach.

Q: That doesn't seem worth my time.

A: Since 2004, I've handsold several thousand books. Every single time you sell a book to someone who wouldn't have otherwise discovered it, it's worth your time.

Q: Selling isn't my job. Writing is my job.

A: Being self-employed is like being the CEO of your own company. It's a really lousy CEO who focuses on production with total disgrard for who is buying the product. A better approach is to study every aspect of what your company does, and implement ways to improve things wherever possible.

Q: I know a lot of authors who sell a lot more books than you do, and they don't do any of this crap.

A: People win the lottery every day. That doesn't mean it's wise to invest your retirement savings in scratch-off tickets.

Q: How am I supposed to handsell books when I have a fulltime job/family/sick cat/hang nail/grandiose sense of entitlement/fear of public speaking/sweating disorder?

A: I don't know of any goal worth pursuing that doesn't involve hard work, sacrifice, and commitment. Becoming a writer isn't easy. Staying a writer is even harder. How hard you work at it tells a lot about how important it is to you.

30 comments

I Talk, You Pay

I've been asked this question so many times I'm surprised I haven't blogged about it before.

If you're a writer, you're probably going to be asked to speak in public at some point.

The first few times this happens, you'll be flattered. So flattered, that you'll happily speak for free, or for the opportunity to sell three or four books to the crowd afterward.

As your star rises, you will be offered more and more speaking opportunities. In fact, you may get so many requests that you can pick and choose which ones to accept.

You'll pick the ones that are nearby and easy to get to. You'll pick the ones that will have the biggest crowds. You'll pick the ones where you were invited by a friend, or someone in the biz whom you owe. But first and foremost, you'll pick the ones that pay.

Being paid to speak is a wonderful thing. It validates your success. It gives you a forum where you're obviously appreciated. And most of all, it helps defer the cost of promotion, which is costly indeed.

But when someone contacts you and asks, "How much do you charge?" most new writers don't know how to answer.

Let's take a few scenarios.

1. A nearby library asks you to speak.

When I'm approached by a library within easy driving distance (less than 2 hours) I always ask if they offer a speaking fee.

Some libraries have budgets for speakers, and need to spend these budgets or else they lose them. Some libraries have no budgets, and can't pay anything at all.

If they don't offer a set dollar amount upfront, but instead ask what your fee is, I tell them to average the last three fees they've paid previous speakers, and I'll accept that.

This price can vary. I've spoken at libraries for a handshake. I've spoken at libraries for a tote bag. I've also spoken at libraries and gotten as much as $1200. The average is between $50 and $150.

Ask if you should bring books to sell (get these books from your local indie at a 40% discount, so they go toward your royalties.) I usually sell books to library patrons at a discounted rate (five bucks for paperbacks, twenty for hardcovers) and always bring some free giveaways for patrons, and some free books for the library.

2. A far away library asks you to speak.

I usually forgo the speaking fee, and instead ask for travel expenses. I do this because I figure I'm being taken someplace where I wouldn't normally go, for free. So I'll ask for gas or airfare, plus hotel if I'm staying overnight.

Many libraries will also throw in a free meal, which is always welcome. :)

3. A writing conference or convention asks you to speak.

Again, I usually do this for travel expenses, plus free admission to the event (including food if they have it.) I prefer the conference to handle flight/hotel details, rather than reimburse me later, because it makes things easier come tax time.

Could you ask for a fee on top of this? Sure, if you're big enough star. Some NYT writers ask for first class travel, accommodations, plus anywhere from $3000 to $50,000 to speak.

I'm not there yet. Someone paying for my travel is enough to get me someplace. If they insist on a little something above that, I won't turn it down.

Sometimes, I'll be invited to speak someplace (a book fair, a bookstore manager meeting) and won't be offered any sort of fee or travel expenses. I may still go, depending on the value of the event. Wouldn't you fly anywhere for a chance to speak to three hundred bookstore managers, or get a sound bite on the ten o'clock news?

If you're keynoting an event, receiving an award, or teaching a class, you aren't out of line to ask for them to cover expenses. After all, they want you, and you're there to work, so you should be paid for your efforts.

At these events, there is usually a bookseller who has your books available for sale. Be sure to contact them a few weeks prior to the event, to make sure they've got your books. While at the event, make sure you meet them and say thanks, and offer to sign their remaining stock.

4. Your publisher books a speaking engagement for you.

If you're lucky, your publisher may send you someplace to speak, usually at an industry convention like BEA or ALA or GLBA.

They may pay. They may not. It depends on their marketing budget for your book.

If your publisher does get you in front of a group of industry professionals, I say go, even if they don't pay your way. They can open doors you can't, and it's worth your time and money.

If they do pay, watch the expenses. Don't soak them for expensive room service or pay-per-view movies. This isn't a free vacation. It's a business trip.

If they don't pay, you can always ask your publisher for books to take to the event. Give away every last one they send you, and have them send the books to the hotel, not your home, so you don't have to travel with them.

This should go without saying, but DO NOT ask your publisher for a speaking fee. You might, however, ask them to compensate you for expenses after the fact, even if they originally said no to your request. Save your receipts, and give them a detailed rundown of what you did. Wowing a group of booksellers will get your publisher excited about you, and make them freer with the checkbook.

Conclusion

How much are you worth? It depends. Certainly your time is worth something. But when you're building a career, every chance you have to speak is time well spent. Even if it's a small crowd. Even if you don't sell a single book.

You never know which events are going to be stellar, and which are going to lead to even bigger events. I try to do as much as I can afford, both in terms of time and money. Getting paid is nice, but any opportunity that you have to speak in front of a group is an opportunity you should try to take.

Just remember: Before you start wondering how much you're getting paid, be sure that you're worth whatever they're offering. Hone your public speaking skills before you get in front of a crowd, or you may soon find yourself without any offers.

29 comments

Charging

Last year I was on the road for more than ten weeks, promoting my books.

It wasn't easy on me, or my family. Much of that time, I was touring. But a good amount of it was spent speaking at events, giving lectures, teaching classes and seminars —things not directly related to selling my books.

Sure, my books were usually available for sale after these events, and I usually moved a few copies. But I wasn't there to talk about my series. I was there to talk about agents, and editors, and publishing. This wasn't book promotion. It was teaching.

I liked doing this. Even if I wasn't paid. Even if I didn't sell a single book after the event.

I still enjoy it, but my wife laid down the law and told me that I couldn't do any more events unless I was monetarily compensated for my time.

I could understand her reasoning. While I still feel that helping new authors is something all writers should do, she pointed out that I spend a lot of time and money driving around and lecturing. So I decided to begin charging for most of my appearances.

I expected that this would limit the amount of events I did. But, strangely, I still wound up doing a lot of traveling. A lot of organizations and libraries have budgets for these things, and were happy to get me.

It made me rethink my prior attitude. I once believed I owed the world a karma debt, and had to help everyone I could. When someone asked me to speak, I was flattered. Money wasn't important.

But then I realized that money *was* important. I'm a professional writer, and I get paid for doing that. If I'm being approached as an expert on the publishing world, and headlining events where I speak for two, three, or four hours, what's the difference between me and a professional speaker? And don't professional speakers get paid, just like professional writers do?

I certainly wouldn't write a book and let someone publish it for free. Yet I'll drive hundreds of miles, and speak to crowds of people at *paying* events, for free.

It made no sense. So now I charge.

I'm still grateful to be published, and still flattered to be asked to speak at events, but I'm no longer going to spend an evening driving to some remote location, lecturing my heart out, all for the opportunity of selling three paperbacks.

My time, and my lectures, have value.

It only took me four years to realize it.

19 comments

Am I Evil? Yes I Am.

My friend Lee Goldberg referenced my previous post, **The Importance of Being You**, on his wonderful blog **A Writer's Life.**

Apparently, I've irked some anonymous mystery writer by having the gall to say that writers should try very hard to earn out their advances and make money for their publishers, even if it means spending a lot of their own time and money to do so.

I like Lee, and I appreciated his level-headed and thoughtful response to the matter. Mr. Anonymous, however, needs an extra-large reality enema.

He wrote Lee the following:

How can you be friends with Joe Konrath? He's the anti-Christ. In his own way, he is as bad or worse than Lori Prokop. The advice he gives to aspiring writers is just terrible and, worse, he's doing everything he can to undermine his fellow professionals. How, you ask? He's perpetuating the myth that you should devote all or part of your advance to promotion, that you should devote yourself to making sure that the publisher makes money (even if it costs you). What he's doing is legitimizing the damaging corporate mindset that authors should pay for their own promotion without any investment or reimbursement from the publisher. We're supposed to live off our advances, not kick them back to the publisher for advertising and promotion. Joe's latest moronic blog post was so infuriating I almost put my fist into my laptop screen. Of course his publisher loves him. But professional writers should fear him. He's cancer.

For the record, I'm not a Cancer. I'm an Aries.

And though I don't agree with everyone's opinion, I certainly respect their idiotic ideas, and their bone-headed right to poorly express them.

I long-windedly (go figure) responded to this anonymous author on Lee's blog. Here's my final take on the subject:

I'm the president of my own company. The brand my company sells is "JA Konrath."

In order for my company to make money, I need to invest my own time and money up until the company reaches a critical mass and can run itself.

The time to invest my money is at the beginning, because most businesses fail within the first few years.

It's my name on the books. It's my brand. If my sell-through isn't good enough, there will be no more books. Bye-bye writing career.

I'm supposed to let my success or failure rest in the hands of my publisher? They're my co-investor. They're not my enabler. They're not my boss.

The philosophy, "If you earned out your advance it wasn't high enough" is a bad one. This isn't an *us against them* contest, with *them* being your publisher.

This is a partnership. If your partner is making money, you're making money.

An advance isn't free money. It's money based on potential book sales. It's like a non-returnable loan. Your publisher is betting you sell X number of books, and giving you your share in advance.

If you got zero advance, and sold X number of books, you'd get the same amount of money. It would just be later rather than sooner.

Spending your advance money on selling more books is a way to ensure you get into that royalty phase even sooner.

Does this make your publisher happy? Of course. They gambled and won.

But so did you. Because you get a higher advance. A bigger print run. More promotional dollars. Your backlist stays in print. Your sales reps push your books harder. You're talked about in-house. Everyone wants to be a part of a winning team.

I didn't have a book tour for my first book. But I spent a lot of money, and worked hard to sell it.

Did my publisher notice? Yes. They gave me a book tour for #2. I went to 11 bookstores on the West coast, all expenses paid. Damn nice hotels too.

Did I hang out at these nice hotels during my free time, ordering room service and pay-per-view porn? No. I visited 95 more bookstores while on that tour, and then another 100 on my own.

Did my publisher notice? Yes. The new tour is 500 bookstores, and they're paying.

How is this a losing proposition for either of us? If they make money, I make money.

My publisher does a lot for me, but I have more at stake than they do. They have 200 other authors, all writing books, all who are getting a piece of the promotional pie.

I should just write the best book I can, and then cross my fingers and hope it sells?

Sorry. The best product in the world will fail if no one buys it.

I should nag my publisher to spend more money on promoting me? They already spend a bunch. They are the ones investing the big bucks. They are the ones taking all of the financial risk.

There's no guarantee that big promotional dollars=success. Jim Huang had a great keynote speech about promotional dollars, which can be found at http://www.statelyhuangmanor.com/essays/DSkeynote.htm.

There's no guarantee that wonderful writing=success. I've read a lot of wonderful books by authors who can no longer sell their latest because their previous numbers were bad.

The only guarantee I have is: The harder I try, the more books I sell. This I know for a fact, and I've proven it time and time again.

Best case scenario, my books catch on, all the money I spent will come back to me in royalties and multiple printings and larger advances down the line. I'm investing in a stock that I'm betting will go up. Worst case scenario, I fail. But I won't be bitter, and I won't blame my publisher or the universe for the way the cards fell.

If I fail, I want it to go down swinging. I want to know that I did everything within my power to launch my career.

I can understand why authors don't like this philosophy. I'm saying that success isn't all luck or talent. I'm saying that the author can, and should, play a major part in selling their own books.

So I pose this business model, and authors are afraid they'll have to adopt it as well?

I know a lot of authors losing money hand over fist with high advances and poor sell-through, and then blaming their publishers for their lackluster sales.

Does the publisher make the author pay back the advance if the book doesn't earn out? Does the author lament the money lost by the publisher, not only on the advance, but on the production costs, the promotion, the publicity, the market, the advertising?

No. Authors scream "gimme gimme gimme" and whine how the publishers aren't doing enough. They whine that they didn't get enough co-op. Or frontlist catalog copy. Or not enough reviews. Or no tour. Or no advertising.

But they don't try to fix any of these things themselves. And they don't shoulder the financial loss, which can be considerable.

This is the preferable business model? If so, it needs to be changed. Then maybe more books would actually be profitable, which would benefit everyone.

Scary thing, though, taking your fate into your own hands. Even scarier, backing it up with your own money.

You can disagree with me. You can even hate me.

But I'm really not the one you should be angry at, am I?

The whole "I'll just write good books and my publisher will sell them" is an archaic philosophy, and the only authors who should be afraid of self-promoting are the dead weight ones already losing money.

Take some responsibility, for your sales, and for your career.

And if you have a problem with me, Mr. Anonymous, don't go whining to Lee Goldberg like some high school drama queen loser and question his opinion of me. This back-biting and name-calling hurts the mystery community, and publishing in general.

Debate is great. Open exchanges of ideas, and the disagreements they provoke, can be helpful.

But your opinions were concealed as insults, and then you gave Lee permission to post your muck-raking, as long as he didn't use your name, because heaven forbid anyone hold you accountable for your opinions.

Next time, be a man. You don't like what I have to say? Post on my forum. You can even do so behind your cloak of invisibility, so no one knows your real name and what a weenie boy you are.

36 comments

Eggs in Baskets and Hatched Chickens

(This post isn't directed at anyone in particular, and you know who you are.)

I've met a lot of authors. Some pre-published. Some seasoned pros. Some somewhere in between.

Most writers have some sort of publicity plan. They're going to set up local signings, or take out some ads, or start a blog, or have a contest, or get some big blurbs, or attend a lot of conferences, or send out postcards, or visit a lot of libraries, or print up 10,000 bookmarks, or pay to promote their website, or teach classes, or try to manipulate their Amazon numbers, or give away lots of free copies or their book, or have a large internet presence, or make vidlits, or all of the above (which is what I did, in one way or another.)

And most writers soon find out that their best laid plans, when executed, don't meet their expectations.

It's hard to sell books. Which is why 4 out of 5 published don't earn out their advance.

A lot of writers I know, when they find out their plans didn't pan out, become discouraged, bitter, depressed, and resentful.

This brings up an important point —-one that many authors, both new and seasoned, fail to grasp: If you build it, they won't always come.

Having marketing ideas or strategies is good —enthusiasm and a willingness to experiment with publicity and marketing will help you in the long run. But too many authors think that an ad, or a contest, or a vidlit, or a blog, will automatically sell books. It won't.

There's no single path to success. Some authors do the bare minimum, and sell like crazy. Some try like crazy and still have poor sell-through.

I'm confident in saying I self-promote a lot. I'm a minorly successful author. I believe I have very good name recognition in comparison to my sales (meaning I'm known by more people than simply those who buy me.) I believe this name recognition is based on all that I have done to promote myself, and that many sales have resulted from my efforts —sales that wouldn't have happened otherwise. My site and blog get a lot of hits. I get a lot of fan mail. My readership is growing. These are all good signs.

But still, as much as I'd like to take credit for the way my career is going, the fact is that luck plays a huge part.

Much bigger authors than me have done much less on the self-promotion front, but sell in much greater numbers. I can say, "Do this, do that, keep trying" but the fact is, none of my efforts have led me to the bestseller lists. James Patterson can say, "Do nothing but write a good book" and his path did lead him to the bestseller list.

For all of our efforts, there's still an X Factor that determines success. Some unknown, unteachable, unreachable thing determines who makes 7 million a book, and who loses their publishing deal due to poor sell-through.

You can increase your odds that Factor X happens by working hard, trying new things, and never giving up, but there are no guarantees.

So why even bother? If it's all up to fate, why spend 80% of your time trying to sell your books?

For me, it comes down to peace of mind. If one of my efforts falls flat, at least I can tell myself that I tried. If my career falls flat, it won't be because I didn't make an effort.

So I recommend that you try. You try everything. You try often. You keep at it, even when nothing seems to work.

But, luckily, sometimes things do work. I believe the failures outnumber the successes in marketing, but when the successes do happen, they make it all worthwhile.

Plus there's the unknown, cumulative effect of your efforts. You might have only gotten three people at your signing, but several hundred saw the sign promoting it. Factor X can come into play in small ways — you meet a TV producer at a convention, someone discovers your blog and wants to do a newspaper story on you, your website contest leads to a foreign rights sale. Your efforts yield more than book sales. They lead to word-of-mouth, brand awareness, and name recognition.

So next time you have a brilliant marketing idea, don't put all your eggs in one basket and count those chickens before they've hatched. The best stock portfolios diversify. Sometimes the sure-thing falls flat, and it's the penny stock that makes you rich.

If you know that a lot of your efforts will fail, you'll be a lot happier at the end of the day.

33 comments

The Best Promotional Bang For Your Buck

Actually, the title of this blog is misleading, because this type of promotion actually pays you. Perhaps not very much. And there is an investment of time. But this can allow you to reach more people than anything else you do, including writing your novels.

Naturally I'm talking about selling short stories.

I get a few emails a week from people who have discovered my writing in places other than the Jack Daniels books. And it makes sense why. There are a few hundred thousand Jack books in print. But if you combine all of the anthologies and magazines I've been in, my stories have been seen by over a million readers.

One of the problems with advertising is that it only offers a promise of something. But a story offers more than a promise. It offers a sample.

Your writing is the best advertisement for your writing, because if people like it, they'll buy more. But getting people to discover that your books even exist, and then try them, is hard to do.

Short stories help to bridge this gap.

There are several short story markets to consider, and I'll list the pros and cons. But first, an important rule:

WRITE FOR THE INTENDED MARKET.

Would you spend hours making a key without having a lock it can open? No. But many authors write whatever the hell they want to write and then erroneously believe there will be a market begging to publish it. That usually isn't the case.

Magazines, anthologies, and websites all have specific demographics. They want specific stories to please these demographics. It's much easier to write for a market than write according to your whim and then try to find a market that will buy it.

When you have found a market, read it. Don't guess what you think the editors will like. Discover what the editors like by reading stories they've already published.

Also, it makes good sense to write stories about the characters who are in your novels. The closer the tie in, the more likely you are to sell a book if someone likes the story.

Got it? Good. And if it stifles your muse, remind yourself that writing is a job. If you want to write for fun, why are you reading this blog?

Here are the markets:

MAGAZINES

Pros - They can have a large circulation, for both subscriptions and newsstands. They're usually specific in their target audience, which means your accepted story will reach a group of people that might not

otherwise be aware of you. They can pay pretty well, though I've never gotten more than $500 for magazine fiction.

Cons - Magazines are disposable. While some of the genre rags are collectible, the majority of readers you'll reach happens during the month the mag is fresh. Most magazines, even the big ones, pay very little. And once a story is published by a print mag, it can only be sold again as a reprint, which lessens its appeal for other markets.

ANTHOLOGIES

Pros - Print runs and distribution can be huge. I was in an anthology called THRILLER which was published two years ago, and it has close to half a million books in print. I'm in two big anthos this year, WOLFSBANE AND MISTLETOE, edited by Charlaine Harris and Toni L.P. Kelner, and BLOOD LITE, edited by KJ Anderson for the Horror Writers of America. Both will have large print runs, plus they'll hopefully stay in print for years, leading new readers to my work. Pay can be pretty good —-I've gotten as much as $2000 for stories. They're also a great way to find fans of bigger authors. Many people buy anthos for a specific author's story, then become your fans too.

Cons - The really big anthos are invite-only. This is where your conference schmoozing and networking pays off. Anthologies are very much about who you know. Most don't pay very well —sometimes you only get contributors copies. And the smaller anthos have small print runs of less than a thousand, so it might not be cost-effective to provide them with a story when you could be writing your novel.

LIMITED EDITIONS

Pros - Niche collector markets are how many horror writers stay in the black, selling ultra-tiny print runs in signed and numbered editions. As a collector, I love these things. They pay can be decent —-a few hundred bucks —-and it is a treat for your fans to own something exclusive. Plus, small genre presses have people who collect their whole press runs, so you can make new fans. You can also sell limited editions of stories that are otherwise impossible to sell, namely novellas.

I've got two Harry McGlade novellas coming out this year. For the uninitiated, Harry is a character in the Jack Daniels books. He's a private eye, and not a good one. Harry will be in SUCKERS, co-written with Jeff Strand, coming out from Delirium Books and clocking in at 12k words, and he has a novella in the antho LIKE A CHINESE TATOO, coming out from Dark Arts Books, which is the ungainly length of 13k. Not many markets accept stories of this size.

These are small print runs of under 500, but I'll be reaching some hardcore horror fans, which is a demographic that hasn't embraced my novels yet.

Co-writing is also a smart way to enlarge your audience. Strand writes funny horror novels (much like my funny thrillers) so we'll find each other's fans when SUCKERS. In the BLOOD LIT antho, I did a story with F. Paul Wilson, and hopefully some of his large fanbase will check my stuff out as a result.

Small presses also give you a chance to experiment, and get a little crazy. Those two McGlade stories have some scenes in them I'd never allow in the Jack books, because they're too over-the-top.

Cons - The small print runs and high prices usually mean no library sales, and collectors will hold onto their copies. This means limited readers, even if those readers become fans. And the money can be terrible or even non-existent, making these endeavors very cost-ineffective. Plus, once they're gone, they're gone. Unlike regular anthos, these usually have a limited shelf life.

THE INTERNET

Pros - This burgeoning market has many advantages. First, it is eternal. A story can keep finding new readers as long as it is online. Amazon Shorts, and some webzines, even pay you, so you've got the potential for unlimited readers and (in Amazon's case) unlimited income. Websites aren't as discerning as print publications, making it easier to get a story published on the net. Hell, you can even publish your own on your website.

Cons - The pay is often very small, and more commonly non-existent. Some print publishers consider online publication first rights, and won't publish anything that has appeared on the net. And many webzines aren't well-edited, meaning your story can look and read like shit, which isn't helping you to recruit fans. Plus, many folks don't like to read fiction online. And, if there are royalties involves, peer-sharing is going to take a chunk out of it. Why pay for something that you can get for free?

NEW MARKETS

Sure, we lament the dwindling circulation of the newspaper, and the lack of magazine fiction markets, but more markets are becoming available all the time.

Downloads are primed to take off, and not just for your computer or e-book reader. People are reading on their Nintendo DS game units (via Moonshell), iPods, PDAs, and even cell phones (if your phone has a browser go to http://www.textonphone.com/.) Print on demand is allowing anyone to edit their own anthology with http://www.anthologybuilder.com/. A few months ago, my son got audiobook CDs with his burger meal at Wendy's. This week, he got free print books in his cereal boxes —-short paperback versions of the Spiderwick Chronicles.

There are more venues for our short works than ever before, and those short works are like started drugs, leading readers to the harder stuff that writers can actually make money on.

So when you're planning your next promotional endeavor, consider staying home and knocking out a few short stories. It's never been so easy to reach so many.

12 comments

Firestarter

Have you ever tried to start a fire?

Our backyard is the size of a postage stamp, but we have just enough room for a few chairs, a grill, and a fire chimney —one of those cast iron ovens that looks like a pear and makes a campfire safe and supposedly easy.

Well, starting fires isn't easy.

Though a fire doesn't fit the strictest definition of "life" it still eats, breathes, and reproduces. And, like life, it requires care to thrive.

If you're new to starting fires, you'll throw some wood on a pile, hit it with a match, and hope for the best.

Sometimes luck is on your side, and you'll soon have an inferno.

But most of the time, starting a fire takes more effort than that. You need to properly stack the wood, so air can flow around and through it. You need kindling, or tinder, or both, and perhaps even an accelerant. And then you need to keep a vigilant eye on the fire, poking and prodding and feeding it until it's big enough to last for a awhile without constant attention.

Sound familiar?

Yesterday I dropped in 11 bookstores with the talented **Tasha Alexander** (And Only to Deceive, A Poisoned Season) and the talented **Renee Rosen** (Every Crooked Pot.)

We were starting fires.

I signed 93 books. Not a huge amount, considering I have several hundred thousand in print. Hardly a dent, really. And while several of the booksellers we met were interested and enthused to see us, in a few cases we were met with apathy. That's how drop-ins go. Some are great. Some make you scratch your head and wonder why you're doing this.

Still, I consider this time well spent. Signed books have a better sell-through. They're put in higher profile places around the store. Meeting booksellers is always a good thing. Plus, tending to your career, even in small ways, is more productive than sitting on your ass with your fingers crossed, hoping things go well.

Your writing career, like a fire, has no guarantees. Sometimes what you think was a sure thing won't turn out. Sometimes you can spend a long time stoking and still not get a good burn going. Often parts of the fire will die when you focus on other parts. And even if you do everything right, it might rain anyway.

But the more attention you pay to your fire, the longer it will last. The same goes with your writing career.

This philosophy, while excruciatingly simple to understand, is still met with a lot of resistance from some of my peers.

Many writers hate promoting. Visiting 11 bookstores in a day (or 618 in a year) is unthinkable. They believe that a writer's job is to write a good book, and that's all.

If you want to write books and then cross your fingers, that's up to you. Build the woodpile, throw the match, and walk away.

But anyone who has had any experience building fires knows the importance of maintenance. The careful cultivation of the flames once they start is important.

For those who haven't been beaten over the head with this analogy yet, tending a fire equals self-promotion.

It makes perfect sense to self-promote. Your books are your brand. No matter how good your brand is, you still need to make people aware it exists. As creator of the brand, you are uniquely suited to extol its virtues. And since it is your name on the brand, you have a vested interest in its success.

But some writers still resist this. There are reasons for this resistance:

- Fear of failure, or public speaking.
- Conceit, or a belief that promo isn't needed because the book is so good.
- The deep-rooted human trait that makes us dig in and defend our actions rather than question them.
- An incorrect view of how publishing works.
- A sense of entitlement, which posits that writers write and it's the job of the publishers and booksellers to sell.
- Having tried self-promo in the past, and not getting the expected results from it.
- Believing that writers can't make a difference in sales, and that promotion is futile.
- The need to disagree because if they agree, they'll feel guilty about not doing enough to help their own career.

Do you have to self-promote?

No. There's no law or rule that says you have to.

You don't have to brush your teeth either, and you might still live your whole life without getting a cavity.

That doesn't make it good advice.

For those interested in picking up signed JA Konrath books (along with signed Tasha Alexander and Renee Rosen books) you can visit one of the following fine Chicago establishments:

Barnes & Noble at Webster Place, Barnes & Noble on Diversey, Barnes & Noble on State Street, Barnes & Noble on Touhy, Borders on Clark, Borders on Lincoln, Borders on Michigan, Borders on North Ave, Waldenbooks at 900 N. Michigan, Borders on State Street, Borders on Broadway

On July 25, I'll be at **Mystery One Books** in Milwaukee, at 7pm until at least 8pm. Stop by and say hi.

5 comments

The Follow-Up

I feel I do pretty well at self-promoting.

I meet a lot of key people —booksellers, librarians, and fans —both in person and online. I try my best to make a good impression by being friendly, approachable, helpful, courteous, thankful, and genuine. I know how to pitch, how to give good interview in print, radio, and TV, and how to make sure I hit key points that will hopefully lead to sales, or at least to being remembered.

But I have an Achilles heel. I'm crummy at the Follow-Up.

The Follow-Up is a simple, yet powerful, self-promotional tool. In short, it's reaffirming the relationship (a bookstore meeting, a well done interview, a great review) by responding within a relatively short period of time. Sometimes the response is a simple "Thanks!" Sometimes it's a reminder (my new book is currently available.) Sometimes it's simply a note to say we should keep in touch.

A Follow-Up makes a person feel special, while also keeping you in the forefront of that person's mind. It takes very little time to do.

Yet, for some reason, I stink at it.

Here are some things you (and I) should be working on to better our Follow-Up skills:

1. **Answer Email.** This should be a no-brainer, but if you're like me and your In-Box is larger than your last novel, keeping up with email is a daunting task. Every few weeks I get obsessed and go on an email-answering frenzy. But it's much easier to keep control of your email with this simple trick: *Respond as soon as you read it.* Then there are no huge, daunting pile-ups, and everyone who contacts you, whether they be fan, peer, or newbie writer asking for blurbs, gets a timely response rather than thinking you're an ignorant jerk.

2. **Respond to Posts.** If you're like me, and you lurk on writing message boards (http://www.bksp.org/), listservs (http://www.dorothyl.com/), Yahoo Groups, newsgroups (news://alt.fiction.orginal/) other authors websites and blogs, and the many other places on the Internet that allow exchanges of information, you'll often occasionally post something. It's easy to post once, then disappear, thinking your work there is done. It's a much better idea to stick around and have some conversations. Remember; No one enjoys being sold something. But people do like to communicate with authors. Like a good website, or blog, it's about what you have to give, not what you ant to sell.

   This also applies to your own blog. If you're getting a lot of responses, it's easy to forget to say thanks to those with kind words. Here's another tip: Check your old posts every so often. Google links to posts that are years old, and people will find them and leave comments, then check back to see if you've responded.

3. **MySpace.** I'm awed at how much time I'm spending on MySpace lately, and the truth is I should be spending even more. I get a lot of MySpace messages and comments, sometimes a few dozen a day. I've been pretty good a bout responding to messages, but when someone posts a nice comment about me, I often don't reply. This is stupid. From now on, every time someone posts a comment on www.myspace.com/jakonrath, I'm going to immediately post a comment on MySpace page. This not only makes the commenter feel good, but then my comment (along with my book cover and link) is on their page for all of their MySpace Friends to see. Ditto responses to your MySpace blog.

   Stay away from spamming. But a nice, personal comment is always welcome, and if it mentions you also have a new book coming out, not many people will mind.

4. **Amazon.com.** We all know that authors can blog on Amazon. You can also create Listmanias, sell stories on www.Amazon.com/shorts and post reviews. A new Amazon option allows people to respond to reviews directly.

   If you're an author, you should blog. You can read my Amazon blog, Listmanias, and reviews, by cliking on any of my books and scrolling down, or by checking out my Amazon Profile.

   There's a new feature that allows readers to comment on user reviews. I **DO NOT** recommend getting into a flamewar with the moron who gave your book one star. Authors should be above that. It's petty.

   However, if they guy is a real brain donor, go ahead. I love posting positive reviews of books I love, and following up by gently correcting the negative ones.

5. **Booksignings.** You would think, with all the bookstores I visit, I'd have a master list of every single bookseller I've ever met. Sadly, I don't.

I have business cards from many of them, but I rarely follow up after dropping by. A simple, "It's was great to visit your store!" email or postcard would go a long way toward getting booksellers to remember me, but I'm lax in this department.

However, I'm working on changing that. In Dirty Martini, I thank over 1300 booksellers by name in the acknowledgements. And each store I stopped in on the Rusty Nail 500 got a free copy of the book, along with this letter:

A note from author JA Konrath.

Hello again! I'm saying "again" because I visited your bookstore last summer while touring the country for my third Lt. Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels mystery, RUSTY NAIL. That tour took me to 29 states, where I signed books at 618 bookstores.

This store was one of them.

Hyperion and I want to thank you for your support, so we've sent you a free copy of the newest Jack book, DIRTY MARTINI. Everyone else has to wait until July 3 (the release date) to read it.

If I was lucky enough to have met you, or any of your co-workers, last year when I dropped in, I've listed you by name in the acknowledgements pages at the end of the book. If I spelled your name wrong or accidentally omitted you, email me at haknort@comcast.net and I'll make sure you're in future editions.

If I didn't get a chance to meet you last year, or if you haven't read my books before, DIRTY MARTINI is a good place to start. It's a fast, fun beach read, sort of a cross between the suspense of James Patterson and the humor of Janet Evanovich.

Some of your peers have already read of DIRTY MARTINI, and they've said some wonderful things about it. Instead of the standard review snippets and author blurbs, my back jacket features bookseller quotes. I'm sorry we didn't have room for all of them. If you already sent me a quote, or if you like DIRTY MARTINI and want to send me one, I'll put your quote and your name on my website, www.JAKonrath.com. I'll also name a character in my next book after the bookseller who sends my the coolest quote.

As you already know, booksellers are not only the smartest, nicest, and sexiest people on the planet, they are also hugely influential. I'm humbled and honored that so many of you have embraced the Jack Daniels series, and have hand sold and recommended them to so many people. Thanks so much for your hard work and efforts. You're awesome.

Hope to see you again soon...

Do you have any Follow-Up tips? If so, please list them here. I promise I'll respond. :)

13 comments

Four Countries

For the pros:

Once you sell a book, your role changes from writer to ambassador. Like a dignitary visiting foreign countries, you must make good impressions on them so they become allies. And like that dignitary, you'll do so through meetings, promises, favors, gifts, and just being a nice person.

These are the countries you must recruit:

1. Your Publisher

Why: If they like you, what you're writing, and what you're doing, they'll do more for you. Generating in-house enthusiasm is important. The sales team will spend more time selling you. The marketing team will work harder and spend more money. The editing team will be more excited to have you as an author.

How: Visit them. An in-person meeting is crucial. Always be upbeat, gracious, and thankful. Correspond with them regularly, through phone and email. Keep them in the loop and let them know what you're doing to promote yourself. Schmooze them.

Example: On my own I've gotten blurbs from over thirty big name authors, appeared in many magazines and newspapers, signed at hundreds of bookstores, gone to dozens of conferences and conventions, handsold several thousand books, always meet my deadlines, always listen to editing suggestions, pitched ideas to them, written my own catalog and back jacket copy, written press releases, won awards, and kept them up to date on everything I'm doing.

2. Booksellers

Why: Your publisher can get your books on the shelves, but booksellers are the ones who get people to buy them. There are over 15,000 bookstores in the USA. If one person at each store sold one of your books every week, you'd be a huge bestseller.

How: Schedule signings at their stores. Do drop-ins. Go to writing conventions and work the book room. Send out personal letters. Email them. Place ads in publications that they read. Buddy up with your publisher to get invited to bookseller conferences and schmooze. Buy them drinks or food.

Example: I've visited over 400 bookstores, and this year will visit 500. I've partied with booksellers, done signings that have lasted for 8 hours, mailed them gifts, named characters after bookstore employees, thanked dozens of booksellers in my acknowledgements, advertised in publications they read, mailed out thousands of letters with signed coasters and bookplates, and kiss their asses when I see them.

3. Librarians

Why: Books are a product, and no product succeeds without branding and name recognition. Libraries are the hub of many communities. They're places to meet, learn, and be entertained. There are over 15,000

libraries in the USA, and if each bought several copies of all of your books, you'd reach millions of readers—readers who will recognize you, talk about you, and buy future books.

How: Schedule talks and events. Send out personal letters. Email them. Place ads in publications that they read. Buddy up with your publisher to get invited to library conferences and schmooze.

Example: Along with **Julia Spencer-Fleming**, I FINALLY finished sending out 7000 letters to libraries in the USA which include brochures, and interview, and signed coasters. I've attended library conventions, done dozens of speeches and events, and taught classes at libraries.

4. Fans

Why: They buy the books, and like all consumers, they buy what is familiar, what has worked for them before, what they like or think they'll like, and what comforts them. An avid readership of only 100,000 people will buy millions of your books as your career continues.

How: Make yourself accessible. Do signings. Speak at libraries. Attend conventions. Have a decent website, message board, and blog. Return emails. Give out freebies. Hold contests. Send out newsletters. Schmooze them.

Example: I mail out dozens of freebies a month, hold several contests a year, named characters after fans, always answer emails, consistently update my blog and website, have 10,000+ people on my newsletter list, offer advice, attend many signings and conventions, and have partied with many, many fans.

Conclusion: Be prepared to spend a lot of time and money to do all of the traveling, mailing, and schmoozing. Writing a good book is important, but that book must get into the hands of readers, and you're the best person to get that job done.

31 comments

Intangibles

For the pros:

You've been working your ass off, self-promoting like crazy. You do the signings. You attend the conferences. Your website is a work of art. You've got a great Internet presence. You know a hundred booksellers by name.

And you aren't selling squat.

Are you discouraged? Hell yeah. Are you depressed? They don't make Zoloft pills big enough to fix you. Are you convinced that it's one big conspiracy to prevent you from succeeding? I can't help you there, because you're delusional and paranoid. But I can say this:

Sales aren't eveything.

What was that? Is Joe taking back everything he's been crowing about for the last four years?

No. Because sales actually *are* everything. But don't expect everything you do to lead directly to sales.

They do, however, lead to things that lead to sales.

What do I mean? In the last few weeks, here are some opportunities that came to me. I didn't solicit them. I wasn't fishing for them. Somehow these people tracked me down and offered me the following:

- A spot in an anthology
- Four website interviews
- Two website story assignments
- A paid gig judging a writing contest
- A BookPage interview
- An interview with Forbes
- A Guest of Honor spot at a conference
- Three paid library talks
- An invitation to a non-fiction collection
- Two paid teaching gigs at various colleges
- Free attendance to a conference
- Writing a humor article in a magazine
- A newsletter interview

Plus over a dozen people linked to my blog, and about twenty signed up for my newsletter, in the past ten days.

This is what self-promotion does for you. The word gets out. People hear about you and track you down. Your brand continues to grow in all kinds of unexpected, intangible ways.

None of the opportunites I've listed above are the result of any one thing that I've done. They're the result of everything I've done.

And in the long run, they'll help me sell books.

So don't be upset that your best laid plans seem to be tanking. If you're self-promoting, it's helping you. Even if you don't see any immediate benefits.

Keep at it.

18 comments

Momentum

I've learned a valuable lesson these past few weeks.

Writers are fearful creatures. The joy of being paid to be creative, and the unavoidable side effect of egotism that goes along with it, is easily tempered by the constant paranoia that everything will be taken away from us.

We worry about sales, fret over decisions our publisher makes, question the effectiveness of our agents, compare ourselves to peers, and eke by contract to contract, wondering if the ride is going to end.

My attitude has been that of a shark —-keep swimming, or I'll drown.

That means non-stop touring, a constant web presence, a steady release of new product (books and stories), and keeping in touch with fans and peers.

These last two months have changed my attitude somewhat.

I've been writing a lot. In fact, in the last 75 days, I've plowed through about 150,000 words.

It's been great, and made me remember why I became a writer in the first place.

But I've been concerned that my writing time has been at the expense of my self-promotion time, and that I'd lose a lot of what I've built up.

It's nice to be shown I've been wrong.

My website hasn't been updated in months, and I've only been able to post a handful of blog entries. Yet, according to Statcounter, my unique hits have stayed consistent.

I'm still getting a decent amount of email.

I'm still getting requests for stories and articles.

Google Alerts and Technorati have shown me that I haven't left the public eye, even though I've made very few public appearances.

And though I've slowed down seeking out MySpace Friends, more and more folks are approaching me first.

In short, I haven't been forgotten in the last few months.

This has made me revise my original analogy. Instead of comparing a writing career to a shark, I'm going to instead compare it to a locomotive.

It takes a lot to get started. A lot of effort, time, and money.

But once it starts, it takes a lot to stop it.

Careers have momentum. And momentum wants to keep things moving, even if you're no longer stoking the boiler.

How does a writer build momentum? How long does it take for momentum to die?

The easy answer is: the more you do, the more momentum you build, the tougher you'll be to stop.

Every event, every signing, every interview, every short story, every appearance, every email, every newsletter, every blog, keeps you in the public eye. And many of these things keep you there long after you've put in the effort. Old blog posts get new visitors. People pick up an anthology that you were in three years ago. A speaking engagement last year leads to three more this year.

There are countless ways to build momentum. And the more you do, the harder you are to stop.

I've often believed that I'm not reaching for success, rather I'm running from failure.

But it seems like I'm able to take a rest from time to time and simply coast on what I've already done. It's a good feeling. And perhaps when I finish this book, and return to actively pursuing self-promotion, I won't be quite as gung-ho.

It isn't about how quickly it takes for you to reach 100mph —-six seconds or six years. Because once you reach that speed, you're going to be hard to stop.

The goal is getting up enough speed.

What are you doing to build momentum?

32 comments

Your Game Face

Today we're going to talk about your public persona.

Hmm? You don't have a public persona?

Why the hell not?

Public figures need public personas. Writers are public figures. You're a writer.

Even if you stay inside your house 24/7, you're still a public figure, still able to make an impression on the public via the Internet, mail, and phone calls.

You want the impression you leave to be favorable. Every human contact you make or potentially make has the power to recruit fans. Or it can sour people on you before they read a single word.

Your public persona is what you chose to show the world. It's your game face. You reveal what you want them to see. Even if it isn't the real you.

In fact, revealing the real you is probably a mistake.

Authors are insecure types. We seek validation, bristle at criticism, and tend to be demanding, volatile, egotistical, and prone to pessimism. We have a sense of entitlement, and often superiority, while at the same time complaining about everything.

This attitude, if shown in public, won't sell many books for you.

What does sell books?

1. Being nice. Never underestimate the power of a kind word or gesture.

2. Being positive. Remaining upbeat, and projecting an aura of success, helps to actually breed success. Never complain in public, no matter what happens. The only difference between a winner and a loser is the winner is smiling.

3. Being attractive. I'm not talking about physical beauty. I'm speaking of charisma. Be the person that other people want to be. Adjust your words, your clothes, your posture, your style, and invite the world to join your party.

4. Being available. Allowing people to have access to you can only help your cause. The bigger you get, the less time you have, and the more people will appreciate your generosity.

5. Being forgiving. Mistakes will be made. Publishing is made up of people, and people aren't perfect. Neither is the publishing industry. You want to be a duck's back, not a sponge.

6. Being confident. Neediness and desperation are guaranteed ways to scare people away.

7. Being aware. Accentuate the positive. Eliminate the negative. If you don't have anything positive about you, fake it. If you suck at public speaking, stay off the microphone. You need to know your strengths and your limitations, and adjust accordingly.

8. Being professional. This is a business. Be businesslike. That means staying on your toes, not relaxing. It means taking this seriously, not thinking it's a game.

As a writer, you're the first and biggest salesperson for your writing. Thousands of people will judge your books by your persona rather than your words.

Make sure your persona is just as good as your words.

23 comments

Speak To Me

As a writer, you're the best representative for your work. That means you're going to be meeting people and talking about your work. A lot.

Since Whiskey Sour was published in 2004, I've spoken to tens of thousands of people in the course of visiting more than 1200 bookstores and attending over a hundred library events, conferences, and conventions.

In most cases, the talk is one-on-one, chatting with a bookseller, fan, or potential fan about my work. I've covered pitching and handselling in previous blog entries.

But in some cases —-and these cases are becoming more frequent —-I'm speaking to groups of people. This requires a different approach.

If you're like most of the world, you fear public speaking. The very thought of getting in front of a group of twenty, eighty, seven hundred people is enough to induce nausea.

I'm here to say: Get over it, you big baby.

Being asked to speak is a golden opportunity to spread your brand, strengthen your name-recognition, and kick-start the almighty word-of-mouth that we writers all crave. But before I get into the things that you need to keep in mind when speaking in public, let's dispel some of those irrational fears.

Dying in front of a crowd isn't dying in real life. Though having a joke bomb is uncomfortable, and looking out over your intended crowd and seeing people sleeping is a huge kick in the ego, neither of those things is fatal to your lifespan, or even your career. Humiliation isn't that big a deal. You're a grown up, and you need to realize that it isn't necessary for everyone to like you. Who really gives a shit what some stranger in the front row thinks of your speech, your book, or you in general? How is their acceptance going to make you a better person? It isn't.

People want you to do well. This isn't high school, where people are forced to be there. When you speak in front of a crowd, these folks came specifically to hear what you have to say. They're either already fans, or they want some information and/or entertainment. They're rooting for you.

People don't care if you bomb. Have you ever seen a really bad speaker? Have you ever watched someone crash and burn in front of an audience? As a result, did you throw fruit, call them names, or try to physically pull them off the podium? No. You tuned them out. That's all. That's the worst that can happen. If you screw the pooch on stage, people tune you out. You should be used to it. Every time you're in public, people tune you out. Malls, traffic, concerts, events, and everywhere people gather, we ignore each other. People ignoring you while you speak should be no more damaging than people ignoring you on the beach, even though their beach blanket is three feet away from yours.

Now that we've established the worst that can happen is boring a few strangers, here are some ways to make sure you don't bore them, but instead thrill them.

1. Know your audience. I've spoken to third graders, high school kids, high school teachers, college students, grad students, newbie writers, professional writers, library patrons, librarians, booksellers, book clubs, and fans of all types. In each case, they had different expectations of what they wanted from me. In every case, my job was to make sure these expectations were exceeded. If you're unsure what a group's expectations are, ask.

2. Prepare. Once you understand what is expected of you, you need to tailor your speech to their needs. The more of your audience you incorporate in your speech, the better their reaction will be. Then practice practice practice.

3. Act and react. A speech isn't a monologue. It's a dialog, with you doing most of the talking. You need to keep an eye on your audience, and make this an interaction. People tend to dislike being lectured to. But they can be made to feel included by simple things such as eye contact, asking questions, and your responses to their reactions. You aren't talking to an empty room. And audience is an organism that needs care and feeding. DO NOT read directly from your notes, or recite memorized passages. Communication is a two way street.

4. Evolve. If you're a Marx Brothers fan (and you should be) you may have heard that the best bits from some of their most popular movies were refined by performing them in front of audiences. They would change lines from town to town to figure out which got the biggest laugh. As you speak in front of more and more groups, you'll discover what works and what doesn't. Keep what works. Hone what doesn't until it works too.

5. Watch yourself. It's good to encourage feedback at the end of any speech in the form of Q & A, or by simply asking the person who invited you to speak how you did. But chances are you can be lied to, and told you were better than you actually were. If possible, record your performance and watch it later. You'll learn more from that than anything else, by far.

Here are some quickie Dos and Don'ts for public speakers.

DO introduce yourself to members of the audience beforehand. A smile and a handshake helps get them on your side before you go on stage.

DO make sure you stay within the time limit, while still leaving room for questions at the end.

DON'T use speech hesitations like "uh" and "um." It's annoying and unprofessional.

DO use note cards so you keep with your agenda, but don't read from the note cards.

DO thank the audience at the beginning and ending of every speech.

DO stick around after the speech and make yourself available for extra questions, comments, and feedback.

DON'T be a jerk. Ever. Maybe travel was hellish, and you got half the crowd you'd expected, but always remain upbeat, gracious, and professional. One speech leads to another, and even speaking to a crowd of two people can result in future opportunities.

DO dress for success.

DO give your audience a way to get in touch with you after you leave. Mentioning your website is essential.

DON'T oversell your wares. Sure, you want people to buy your books. But this isn't a commercial for them. People want information and entertainment, no ads.

DO have water nearby if your mouth gets dry. But don't drink so much during a long speech that you fill your bladder.

DO ask if a bookseller will be at the event to sell your books. If not, ask if you can bring your own.

Finally, as more speaking engagements are offered to you, you'll find that you have to set some rates. When you're just getting started, at the very least you can still ask to be compensated for travel expenses. As you become sought after, what you charge is up to you. My current rates are between $300 and $2500 per event, depending on proximity and what is expected of me. If you're unsure of what to request, offer to take an average of what they paid their last three speakers. But always make damn sure they get their money's worth.

58 comments

A Face Made for Radio

So I just did my third radio interview in as many days, to promote an event I'm doing in La Crosse, Wisconsin on August 20, and I'm on the fence about the subject.

First things first —-I don't have a large ego (500 rejections will do that to you) but I know I'm pretty good at public speaking. Pull the string, and the monkey tells jokes. So I wasn't nervous, and didn't do any preplanning.

The publicist for the event I'm doing set up the interviews, and each radio personality emailed me a few days prior, setting up the time for the taping.

Each interview lasted between 3 and 7 minutes. I knew I had to get three things across in that time:

1. That I'll be at Waldenbooks in Valley View Mall from 11am-4pm, and a portion of the sales will be donated to the Family Resource Center.

2. That the books are about a cop named Jack Daniels.

3. That I need to be the most entertaining person on the planet.

Number 3 might be considered grandiose narcissism, but it isn't. I HAD to keep the hosts laughing. That's what morning shows are all about.

So how did I do?

Radio person #1 called me on my cell while I was at Best Buy, picking up the new Sin City DVD. I wouldn't have been in the store had I known she was calling (she did a morning show and this was late afternoon.) So I did the interview in my parked car.

It was hot (air conditioning made too much noise) but I got out all the necessary info, and had the host laughing like crazy.

Radio personality #2 called in the morning, at the time he'd told me. He talked a lot, and it was tough to get all of my info in without sounding intrusive. Of course, the UPS guy came while we were talking, which sent my dogs into Attack Mode, and when he commented on my barking dogs I said, "Oh, that's just the UPS man, bringing my weekly selection of Adult DVDs."

Before I had a chance to say "I write them off on my taxes as research" the interview was over.
Perhaps the station was more conservative than I'd guessed. Still, I did my info dump, and managed a few jokes.

This morning, I got a call at the designated time from two very fun radio personalities, who hadn't wanted to interview me because neither of them liked to read, but after exchanging some emails they deemed me funny enough to air for a few minutes.

I answered the phone yawning, telling them that a bestselling author like myself usually parties late into the night. Then I asked for a moment to look under the covers and check to see who I woke up next to. After a long, dramatic scream, I informed them that it was my wife. "A guy can hope," I said.

From there, great interview. They were laughing like hell, I said what I needed to while also ripping on the hosts (the book is perfect for you, Kris —no word is over three syllables) and we went for about 7 minutes, all of it a lot of fun.

Now we'll see what power radio has. Will people come out to my signing based on my interviews? It's a small town, and I was on the big three stations. Will that make a difference?

I'm going to ask each person that shows up. If the radio brought them there, I'll hire a publicist to book me on radio shows (which can cost a few grand.)

If the people don't come out in droves, then I'll still do radio when offered, but won't actively seek it out.

What are your opinions of radio? Does it help sell books?

12 comments

Radio Daze

In my previous post, I openly questioned the effectiveness of radio interviews. To recap:

I was invited to La Crosse Wisconsin to do a library event and a signing at Waldenbooks. The wonderful Terri Schlichenmeyer (rhymes with chickenwire) was able to wrangle three radio itnerviews for me, as well as promote the event on the radio herself. I appeared on four local stations, some of them several times, for three days prior to the event. I was funny, while managing to explain my books and when and where I'd be signing.

La Crosse is a town of about 60,000. How much of that population heard the show, and how many came to my events?

When the day was done, and the numbers had been tallied, the answer was clear:

1

That's one. Uno. Eins. Un.

I did well at the event anyway. I was at the library for 3 1/2 hours and met everyone who walked into the store, which resulted in 44 books sold. Not bad. But only one of those folks came because they heard me on the radio.

"You were really funny," she told me, "so I came by to get your books." She did buy them both, so about 5% of my sales that day were the result of my radio efforts.

Still, it was pretty enlightening. I walked into the store with visions on long lines and excited fans. Reality is a harsh mistress.

At the library event, I had a lovely chat with two librarians, over the large plate of cookies they bought in anticipation of the huge crowd. They apoloigzed for no one showing up. I apologized for no one showing up. They bought a book out of pity.

Afterward, I called up Barry Eisler, because we like to share marketing info, and I asked him about the effectiveness of media in getting people to events. He shared a story of being on a morning TV show in Portland, speaking eloquently, showing his book jacket, touting his upcoming appearance.

His efforts produced a throng of fan.

Yup, one person.

And that was TV, and Barry is a good-looking, entertaining guy.

The conclusion we drew was that all the publicity in the world won't bring people to you unless the people already know who you are.

Had a bestselling author, like James Patterson, been on TV or on the radio, the fans would have come in droves, because people recognize Patterson.

When was the last time you went to a book signing by an unknown author? What brought you there?

If the brand isn't recognized or doesn't meet a consumer's particular needs, the ad gets tuned out. How many men reading this blog know what Natracare is? O.B.? Gyne-lotrimin? Norplant? Massengill? FDS? Depo-provera? Estroven? Monistat 3? You've been bombarded with thousands of commercials and ads for these feminine products, and even if you recognize the names, and may even have some on your home, its doubtful you know what each one does.

You aren't the target audience, so you don't pay attention to the ads.

And if you're a woman, and you are the target audience for these products, chances are you already have a favorite brand and you stick with it, rather than switch because you hear an ad on the radio for a rival product.

As Barry says, there's no silver bullet —-one specific way to slay the beast. As writers we have to keep trying whatever we can, and hope that some combination of our publicity and marketing efforts will get us noticed.

So I'll try radio again. It was fun, and doesn't take up a lot of time. But I won't seek it out. And I certainly won't pay a publicist to get me on the radio, or even TV.

Publicity doesn't work unless you're already a known commodity, and it doesn't work unless your target audience is listening and receptive.

— — — — — — — —-

BTW —for those keeping track (hi Maria!) I took an extra day in Wisconsin to do some drive-by signings:

Barnes & Noble in Madison West signed 8 hardcovers and 4 paperbacks.

Waldenbooks in Madison West signed 2 hardcovers and 8 paperbacks.

Borders in Madison West signed 4 hardcovers and 12 paperbacks.

Booked for Murder signed 3 hardcovers and 14 paperbacks, sold 3.

Barnes & Noble Madison East signed 4 hardcovers and 8 paperbacks, sold 1.

Waldenbooks Madison East signed 2 hardcovers, 4 paperbacks, sold 1.

Borders Madison East signed 2 hardcovers, 4 paperbacks.

Bookworld in Janesville, signed 1 paperback (but they ordered 10 more books)

Waldenbooks in Janesville signed 4 hardcovers, 5 paperbacks, sold 1.

Waldenbooks in Rockford signed 2 hardcovers, 2 paperbacks, sold 2.

Borders in Rockford signed 4 hardcovers, 10 paperbacks, sold 2.

Barnes & Nobel in Rockford, signed 6 hardcovers, 6 paperbacks.

I'm going to be doing drive-bys in Illinois today, accompanied by Melanie Lynne Hauser, whose new book Confessions of Super Mom just hit the shelves. It's super-hero chick-lit with a mystery thrown in. It's also very funny, touching, and a wonderful read. Buy a copy for Mom —-she'll love it.

Also visit Melanie at http://www.melanielynnehauser.com. She's got a great website, and many unique ideas about how to promote books. Her booklaunch party is at Anderson's in Naperville, August 25th. I urge all of my blog readers to attend the event if you're able, to see up close and personal how a successful booklaunch works. I'll be there!

8 comments

Property Values and Writing

Publishing is really all about real estate.

Your in-house publicist works with sales (the reps who sell to 5 main buyers —libraries, chains, indies, department stores, convenience stores/airports) and marketing (advertising, event planning, appearances, touring, media, coop) to coordinate the amount of money spent to promote your book. A publicist usually doesn't have any power —sales and marketing do —and major decisions are made above her head.

The amount of money a book receives for publicity depends on many things, such as print run, competing titles in the catalog, previous sales, and in-house enthusiasm. I've been told that each book released in a quarter receives a pro rata share of the promo money, depending on how big the print run is.

Print runs are determined by orders. I've heard that a publisher takes orders, then doubles the figure, and that's the print run. That doesn't make much sense, but it would explain why 50% is considered an acceptable sell-through.

Writing a book in and of itself isn't going to generate any media. The author, much like the book, needs a hook.

I've done many alcohol-related events, to tie in to my book titles. I'm visiting 500 bookstores this summer, which will help generate some buzz.

My publisher has done many things for me. Lots of ARCs, big pushes at BEA, tours, awards dinners, library and bookselling conventions, point of sales stuff (free whiskey sour mix shipped witht he first ARC). They did a booklaunch party for me that went very well. They've done several ads in NYTBR, Bookpage, PW, and some mystery publications. Most importantly, they've always kept me in the loop, and have encouraged my participation in coming up with ideas.

For my part, I've gotten over forty interviews, sold over thirty short stories (which is the best advertising), visited a few dozen conventions, signed at several hundred bookstores, and tried to get my name out in cyberspace through my website, blog, and generally being a loudmouth.

My sales are decent, but not spectacular. This summer, I'll have about 170k books in print with three titles, HB and PB.

I've gotten some big reviews (PW, Kirkus, Booklist, LJ), but no huge ones (ET, People, NYT) and very few smaller (towns of less than 1 mil) reviews. That's where I'd like to see a bigger push made, because I think that people in the smaller review markets have a greater percentage of readers per capita, and I am pursuing this angle with the new book, sending out ARCs myself.

If the point of this is to sell books, where does real estate come in?

I'll get to that in a moment. First, let's talk about branding.

The word "branding" has been used a lot in publishing. So has "name-recognition." These basically mean that we want "JA Konrath" to be the same as "Coke." People see the bright covers, see the drink title, and automatically know they'll have a few laughs and a few scares reading it.

This happens in three steps.

1. People pick up my books out of curiosity —they've never heard of me before. Or they've heard of my through word-of-mouth or publicity.

2. People pick up my books because they've read me before.

3. My books become an automatic purchase as they are released.

The majority of my sales are still 1 & 2. The secret to 3, I'm convinced, is simply surviving long enough, with a backlist still available, to amass large numbers of books in print. The more books out there, the more chances for people to find them.

Allison Brennan's publisher released three PBOs in three consecutive months, and this strategy was a double-edged sword —-along with getting a lot of books in print at once, it also capitalized on the publicity of a trilogy being released so quickly. Win-win. Of course, it could have backfired. if the first book wasn't any good, no amount of publicity would get readers to buy #2. Since the first book was good, each successive book has debuted higher on the NYT list.

Many bestsellers can become self-fulfilling prophesies. A publisher believes it has a big book, so the reps tell the buyers that this one is getting a large print run and a large push. The buyers anticipate demand from the publicity, and order many copies and are told to sell them word of mouth.

This sometimes backfires. I remember seeing huge stacks of Tom Wolfe and Salman Rushdie books in stores, and bookseller friends have told me the copies sold vs. shipped was ridiculously low.

But the primary factor in book sales, and the point of publicity and marketing, is ultimately real estate.

The more space you take up on a bookshelf, the better store position, the more books you have in stores, the more stores you're in, the likelier you are to sell. It's like Monopoly. Prime property, and ultimately the most property, wins the game.

The goal is to reach the point where you aren't only stocked, but restocked. You want to have permanent space on those shelves. You want to be there when someone goes looking for you, or if someone is just browsing. It's like tenure. That's what branding really does for you.

If you don't sell well, your books will go out of print, and your patch of real estate gets smaller. Smaller space=less sales, and the death spiral has begun.

Slow and steady used to win the race, with publishers carrying midlist authors for many books before the broke out and began selling in large numbers.

These days, there's more competition for space. More books are being published, and they're given less time on the shelves.

Which is why, as authors, we must do everything we can to fight for real estate.

The chains tell their stores when to pull books from the shelves and return them. But there's a loophole. The stores aren't run by computers —they're run by people. If people like your books, they'll keep them on the shelf, even when they are told to return them.

Which is why I'm visiting 500 bookstores this summer. To meet the people. To secure the real estate.

Time will tell if I'm right or wrong.

26 comments

Writers, Start Your Sales Pitch

You're a writer. Why should you need to know about sales?

At a recent writing convention, I moderated a panel about publishing, and asked four editors the question, "What is the difference between an author who does nothing and an author who actively tries to sell their own books?"

The answer: Night and day. A self-promoting author may sell twice as many as a wallflower.

But yet, so many authors are inadequate at making sales. It's embarassing, or beneath them, or uncomfortable, or not their job.

The fact is, all authors should learn how to effectively sell. In fact, you (or someone on your team) has to sell your books six times before you get paid. First, you sell it to an agent, then your agent sells it to an editor, the editor sells it to the publisher, the publisher sells it to the sales team, the sales team sells it to the book buyer, the book buyer sells it to the customer.

If someone isn't buying somewhere in that chain, the book will fail.

Now get ready to hit your print key, because here is the key to successfully selling your work:

The secret to sales is to not make it selling.

Huh?

Concentrate on value, and what you have to offer. Focus on the experience you're giving, not the cost.

Sales isn't about looking for buyers; it's about finding the people who are looking for your product even though they don't know it yet.

Be funny. Be confident. Be genuine. Be memorable. Be enthusiastic.

In person, I've found the best trick to sales is listening to the customer. Not only their needs and wants, but what they had for breakfast, how their brother in Duluth is doing, and what their favorite TV show is.

Pitch your book like you'd recommend a movie to a friend. This is what it's about, and why you'd like it.

Which is more effective:

1. This is a book about a guy named Bill who goes on a journey of self-discovery while battling an evil force that's invaded his home town.
2. Did you like the Matrix? It's like the Matrix written by Stephen King, with giant flesh eating monsters and an ending that you'll NEVER see coming.

Whenever I sell a book, I always use the line, "You'll like this, I promise." This assurance takes the uncertainty out of a purchase, and makes the customer feel like I'm doing them a favor, rather than they're doing me a favor.

Lots more detail about selling is available on the **TIPS** section of my website.

On the Internet and through snail mail, I've found the best selling tool is to offer freebies —-advice, information, stories, signed stuff, and laughs. Give the buyer a reason to keep reading. If it's just an ad, you'll be ignored. But if you're giving them something they want, they won't even realize it's a sales pitch.

So many small presses email me, thinking that a long synopsis will make me rush out and buy their books. They jump right into it: "Here's a excerpt from the latest release from BuyMe Press."

Where's the romance? Where's the foreplay? Where's the sense of fun?

When I send out newsletters, the majority of the text is about giving. Here's a contest you can enter. Here are some free books. Here are some people I'm naming characters after. Here's a free short story. And finally, here's where you can find out about my new release.

In my library mailing, the libraries received content. An interview with two well-known authors. A signed coaster. Reasons why their patrons will want these books, and an easy way to order.

Look at this blog. Look at my website. How much of it is devoted to promoting my writing, and how much of it is devoted to informing and amusing people?

But yet, I'd bet that practically everyone who visits here knows the names of my books.

Is that good selling? You tell me.

32 comments

The Ups and Downs of USPS

I go to the United States Post Office (our nation's fourth largest armed force) a lot.

This morning I have 18 packages to send out. I average about 30 a month.

Today I'm mailing:

30 signed bookplates to a store in PA that request them
2 copies of BLOODY MARY for reviewers
3 handouts from Dark and Stormy Conference for folks who missed my classes
4 copies of Ellery Queen for folks who won a website contest
1 magazine to a guy who won a newsletter contest
1 BLOODY MARY for a woman who won a newsletter contest
3 copies of WHISKEY SOUR for people who ordered them from my website (I break even on the deal)
1 free copy of WHISKEY SOUR for an ailing fan
1 copy of BLOODY MARY for a radio interviewer
1 copy each of WHISKEY and BLOODY for a mystery conference chairperson

No submissions to magazines or anthologies this week, because I haven't written any new short stories lately. But I did mail out five in May (two rejections so far, need to send those back out.)

Last year, I mailed out over 500 free things: chapbooks, books, magazines, signed coasters, bookplates, flyers, etc. The mail is yet another weapon in my marketing arsenol.

I don't do postcards, because people throw away postcards, and I never bought a book because I received a postcard.

Everything I send out is signed, which I do because I'm hoping that peole won't throw away something autographed.

Does it work? Does giving folks signed stuff and running ten contests a year make them rush out and buy my books? Or do the same three people keep entering over and over because they want something free?

I dunno. But I keep doing it anyway.

I do have some proof that my ongoing association with the United States Postal Service is working. Last week, my mailman came to my booklaunch party.

See? I'm a marketing genius.

Gotta start working on the garbage man next...

6 comments

Who Knows You?

Successful diseases are spread by the infected rather than soley by the carrier. A carrier can only do so much. But if one person can make ten people sick, and those ten can each infect ten others, and so on, you have a a pretty successful disease.

Of course, people can become immune to disease. To survive, the disease must have the ability to mutate, spreading itself in a slightly different form.

Take the common cold. Chances are, we've all had a cold before. Probably several. They're all related to one another, but different enough that our antibodies can only fend of specific viruses. We get infected again and again.

It's no coincidence that viral marketing works in the same way.

We all want to be successful diseases, and infect others. Our pathogen is our writing. Our means of transmission include the Internet, bookstores, libraries, newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, and most importantly, other people.

But are the things we're doing actually doing anything at all?

Writing is a tough business for many reasons. Judging a writer's success proves tricky.

Is success about how much money the writer makes? How many copies of his work are in print? How many pieces of paper his name is on? Or is it more subjective, like how many awards he's won, or how the critics have embraced him?

For the sake of this article, I'll concentrate on a specific form of success, and the ways it can be verified.

Success = Name recognition.

Ultimately, your work sells your work. Or, more specifically, whether someone likes your writing or not plays a large part in if they'll ever read you again.

But for them to read you for the very first time depends on them discovering you.

It may be in a bookstore, browsing. As writers, we have little influence over this, unless we visit as many bookstores as we can and sign stock, and make sure our publishers get us on the shelves (easier said than done.)

But I believe that savvy writers put a lot of their marketing efforts into spreading awareness of their name and brand.

In short, I can't make someone buy one of my books, but I can make people aware that they exist.

Generally, the more people aware of a writer, the more successful he is. A percentage of people who know about you will seek you out, buy your books, and tell others about you, perpetuating the cycle.

To be a successful writer requires fame.

Looking at writers who have become successful, and comparing them to viral successes on the internet, I've found many comparisons.

A successful book is a lot like a successful YouTube video, or meme, or chain letter email. To reach a lot of people, the same things have to happen.

1. It Must Have Appeal. This is where your craft and talent come in. There has to be something about the work that interests as wide an audience as possible.

2. It Must Have A Distribution Network. The work must be available. The more readily available it is, and the easier it is to get, the more people it can reach.

3. It Must Be Talked About. The internet makes it very easy to share information, on two main levels. The first is through direct communication such as email, chat, message boards, and usenet, which allow us to share things with our friends, family, co-workers, and even strangers. The second is by being an authority, where people come to your website or blog and seek the information you're offering.

Both facilitate viral activity.

Real life counterparts to the net are water cooler conversations, telephone calls, and the media.

Becoming famous means being shared, and sharing occurs wherever communication does.

4. It Must Change. While there is an ever-increasing audience for fame, as more people are born every day (which theoretically means you can write one book that will continue to sell forever), a more reasonable approach is to re-infect the same people who have already been infected. That means offering them something new. This keeps the person, or the brand, famous.

In a perfect world, this four part cycle feeds on itself, growing and expanding as more people get in on it. People discover something (a book, a video, an email) and pass that information to others.

If enough people become aware of that information, fame happens.

If fame is big enough, money usually follows.

Now, we all have some fame. We're famous to people who know of us. Becoming more famous means getting more people to know of us.

In some cases, this happens ass-backwards. If a corporation has a lot of money, they can spend that money to make people aware that things exist. A writer can become famous if given enough of a push by his publisher.

But most publishers don't do this with most writers, and there are a lot of famous people who became that way for reasons other than a gigantic ad or media campaign.

There are YouTube videos that have been seen tens of millions of times, and emails that have circulated since 1994 and are still going strong. No advertising or big corporation necessary.

Anyone and anything can become famous. Which begs the question: What are you doing to help spread your fame?

1. Write Something Good. Sure, this is obvious, but it's also the most subjective. What appeals to one person may not appeal to another. Your goals should be to please your intended audience. The bigger the intended audience, the likelier the potential for fame.

2. Make It Available. Once you've written something good, you have to get it to people. The free and easy way is the internet. But we make our living in print, which means submitting to editors. If editors don't want it, perhaps it isn't good enough. Keep writing, keep improving, keep submitting.

3. Get People To Talk About It. This is what causes fame. It's also very hard to do, and even harder to judge the effectiveness of your efforts. In a complex system, cause and effect aren't easily distinguished.

But there are ways you can push the issue, and to check how well you're doing. On the net:

- Google Yourself. Put quotes around your name and see how many people mention you on the web.
- Technorati.com. How many people are aware of your blog?
- Statcounter.com. Who is seeking you out?
- Marketleap.com. Who is linking to you?
- Email. Who is reaching out to you?

The higher the numbers, the more famous you are. If your numbers are low, figure out why. Is it because no one wants what you're offering? Or because no one is aware of what you're offering? How can you fix either situation?

In real life, the ways to check your progress are:

- Media appearances. Are you on the radio and television?
- Public speaking. Who asks you to speak, and who shows up?
- Book signings. How many people come to see you?
- Events. At book fairs, conferences, conventions, what kind of crowd do you draw?

Elsewhere in this blog, I lecture at length about ways to improve your writing and your name-recognition, so I won't repeat them here. This article isn't about how to become famous. It's about the importance of fame and how to monitor it.

Every time you sell a story, speak in public, or post a blog, you have the potential to reach new fans and spread your fame. They may seek you out again, if your story/speech/blog is good enough.

But it will take a very long time to become famous if you're recruiting fans one at a time.

If your story is so good that it gets passed around, if your speech is so terrific that it sells fifty books to people who hadn't heard of you previously, and if your blog is so relevant that people reference it in other blogs, then you have a much better shot at fame.

So ask yourself these three questions.

1. Who knows you?

2. How can you get people to know you?

3. How can you make these people spread the word about you?

It all begins by looking inward and analyzing what you're doing.

24 comments

Why Do You Do What You Do?

When you do any sort of promotion, you need to judge its cost vs. benefit.

Of course, it's rare to actually recoup your time/money investment in any kind of promotion, let alone profit from it. But authors know they have to build brands, and you have to spend money to make money.

That doesn't mean you have to be stupid about it.

Before you do a single thing to promote your book, ask yourself this question:

What is it you want to accomplish?

The more specific your answer, the better job you have of attaining your goal. "Selling 30 books" is provable. "Building name-recognition" is not.

When you've decided on your goal, the next question you need to ask is:

What works on you?

So many authors pursue self-promotional venues without actually thinking about them. There are reasons for this:

1. They know they have to be doing something to promote their book, and it's better to do something than nothing.

2. Everyone else is doing it, so it has to have some merit.

3. They've given zero thought to expectations and return on investment.

The problem with people in general, and the publishing industry in particular, is that very little time is spent analyzing why they do the things they do.

Human nature tends to lean toward self-preservation. This means that people spend more time trying not to look stupid, and justifying their actions, than they do actually thinking about options.

Why do authors go on tours when it's obviously cost ineffective? Why do publishers buy huge ads that could never pay for themselves? Why do authors continue to hire publicists when their fee is never justified by books sold above and beyond what would have been sold anyway?

Because that's the way things have always been done, and humans would rather make excuses for wrong behavior than figure out better mousetraps. No one wants to make decisions, because that requires culpability. So we allow decisions to be made for us by following the same ineffectual paths, and then spend our energy rationalizing their failures.

When I do any sort of promotion, I follow this formula:

1. Decide what you want to accomplish.

2. Decide how much you'll pay to accomplish that, and be able to defend your decision.

3. Figure out a way to judge the effectiveness of your effort.

If that's too complicated, save your time and money and don't promote.

11 comments

A Face Made for Radio

Let's talk about looks.

I'm pretty honest with myself, and I know I'm not going to win any beauty contests.

Under low-lighting conditions, after a lot of drinks, I might be considered average. This doesn't bother me. I'm not a vain guy. And I know that good looks and charisma are two different things, which helps compensate for the fact that the celebrity I most resemble is John Belushi.

But in this business (and in all businesses for that matter) looks do count.

If you've ever watched someone browse the bookstore isles, they always glance at the author photo in the back. Always. And many bestsellers possess above-average looks. I don't think this is coincidental.

As a society, we prize beauty. We use it to sell products. We use it in our media and entertainment. We're bombarded with it from all directions. Mystery conferences even have unofficial beauty contests for male and female writers (the Bouchercon Babe and the Sleuthfest Stud come to mind.)

This is genetic. Studies with infants have shown they stare at beautiful people for longer than they stare at average people. We imbue attractive folks with qualities like intelligence, health, wisdom, humor, and kindness, before we've even met them. We're more forgiving of them, and more anxious to help them.

When I decided to go with the name JA Konrath on my books, rather than Joe, it was a subtle attempt to make readers think I was a female. My idea entirely. After all, I'm writing for a female protagonist, and 80% of all mysteries are purchased by women, and many of my favorite authors in the genre are women.

As a result, my author bio on the book is asexual, and lacks a photo.

Which may have also been a little bit calculating on my part. If I looked like Lee Child, or Robert Crais, or Barry Eisler, or David Ellis, I might not have been so eager to use "JA." And my publisher may not have been so eager to comply.

Do publishers care about looks? Absolutely. I had to FedEx an 8x10 glossy to my future publisher before being offered a contract. I guess my picture hadn't been bad enough to be a deal-breaker (thank God for Photoshop,) and the aforementioned charisma I believe I possess helped my cause. If you can't be gorgeous, be funny or nice.

But everyone knows that publishers do consider looks at acquisitions meetings, along with the quality of the book and the marketability of the concept. Is this author photogenic? Does the camera like her? Does he give good TV? Will she captivate a room full of people? Do the women want him, and the men want to be him?

Which is why, even though I'm sexless on my books, I try to look decent for public appearances. I bought a few nice suits. An expensive pair of designer eyeglasses. I wear a touch of cologne. I even, on occasion, cover up a blemish with make-up.

Still, I can't help but feel I'm just putting a fresh coat of paint on a condemned house.

I got an email the other day from someone who wondered why I made fun of myself on my website, namely in the photos. He seemed angry at me for being self-disparaging, and told me I was taking away from the professionalism of my site by cracking jokes about my weight.

He also pointed out that it seemed I was uncomfortable with my body, and was targeting out my own problems before anyone else had a chance to.

I thought about this for a few hard seconds, and dismissed it. I make fun of everyone, including myself. I like to joke that I lost ten pounds, but then found them again in my ass. I think it's funny.

And I'm also guessing the guy who wrote the email had some issues of his own he needed to deal with. Issues involving Doritos, Twinkies, and husky pants.

Am I uncomfortable with my body? Sure. Who isn't?

Would life be better if I was more attractive? Of course it would.

But the most important question is: would I sell more books?

Which is why I'm currently working hard to lose weight. You can read about my efforts HERE.

In the meantime, I'll continue in my efforts to be funny and nice, and take some solace in the fact that the most famous writer who ever lived, William Shakespeare, looked a lot like Mr. Potato Head.

Didn't seem to hurt his sales.

16 comments

Talking 'Bout Your Reputation

Let's talk about reputations.

Writers have three.

The first, and most important, is your reputation with your fans.

The majority of this depends on the writer's books. Well-written, well-liked books will earn you a good reputation among your fanbase. And fans talk.

A writer's public persona, when meeting fans, is also important. Treating fans well can go a long way to helping a writer's career. Treating them badly can cause serious harm.

Some of your most important fans are booksellers and librarians. These are uber-fans. Give them uber-thanks.

The second reputation a writer must uphold is within the publishing business. What do agents and editors think of you? Honest, loyal, trustworthy, never complains and always makes deadlines? Or a whiney, hard to work with, conceited, spoiled brat?

The amount of time you survive in this business has to do with how many books you sell, but it also has to do with how well you get along with your key contacts in the industry. Being a jerk can come back to haunt you. I've seen this happen to friends of mine.

Finally, you'll have a reputation among you peers. This is the reputation that you have the least amount of control over.

Luckily, this is also the group that you don't need to worry about impressing.

Don't get me wrong —-it's important to have some good contacts in this business among your peers. Being able to talk shop, let your hair down, and help each other with marketing, publicity, editing, etc., is a wonderful thing.

But you will have peers who don't like you. Always. And they'll talk behind your back. Or blog behind your back. Or both. Or worse.

Why?

Part of it is human nature. People talk about each other. Especially people in the same profession. No one is universally liked. If you think you are, you're wrong.

Jealousy or envy may come into play. You're getting more money. Better reviews. More press. More awards. More publicity. More exposure. Maybe you're a better writer, and they resent that. Or maybe you're a crummy writer, and they resent your success even more.

Sometimes personalities just clash. Oil and water won't mix, no matter how hard oil tries.

Hearsay abounds. Stories get twisted around. It's easy, while at the convention bar, to take a cheap shot at someone who isn't there, especially when everyone else is doing it.

Writers, for all their creativity, can be a pretty bitter bunch.

Should you worry about this? The back-biting? The name calling? The rumor mongering?

No.

It isn't your job to impress your peers, because they aren't the ones buying your books. Your job is to impress your fans and your publisher.

The bigger a writer gets, the more people who will hate him. Look at all of the criticism Dan Brown, James Patterson, and Patricia Cornwell get. Some writers actually get angry when you mention one of these names to them. Get a room full of writers together, mention "Patterson" and "Art" in the same sentence, and watch the sparks fly.

Kind of makes you wonder, doesn't it? Maybe being hated isn't so bad...

Do I talk about other writers? Sure. But not in public.

Well, not really.

I've made some cheap shots about Cornwell's last few books, and I'm vocal about my hatred of Hannibal by Thomas Harris, but other than that, I keep my criticisms close to my chest. And there's a reason for this.

What Peter says about Paul often says more about Peter than it does about Paul.

Or, to put it in simpler terms: If you spend a lot of time spouting shit, people are going to realize you're an asshole.

So the next time you're Googling your name, and you come across some nasty comments, be proud. You've pissed some people off! Congratulations! You're on your way!

As Oscar Wilde said, "The only thing worse than people talking about you is people not talking about you."

Now get out there and please some fans.

50 comments

One Book at a Time Part 1

Books are sold one at a time. To individuals.

The aren't sold to nameless, faceless masses. Each of those buyers has a name, and a face, and a reason for buying.

- Some people buy books because they collect them.
- Some people buy books to give as gifts.
- Some people only buy books in certain genres.
- Some people buy books based on reviews.
- Some people buy books based on word-of-mouth.
- Some people only buy books by certain authors.
- Some people buy books because they feel obligated.
- Some people buy books because Oprah told them to.
- Some people buy books to read more than once.
- Some people buy books, read them, then give them away.
- Some people only buy books on sale.
- Some people only buy paperbacks.
- Some people only buy hardcovers.
- Some people only buy large print.
- Some people only buy audiobooks.
- Some people only buy text downloads.
- Some people only buy used books.
- Some people buy for the library markets.
- Some people buy books and never read them.
- Some people read a lot but never buy books.
- Some people buy books to resell them.

And so on. Different people buy books for different reasons. But unless you lecture to businesses who buy in bulk, the majority of books sold are sold one at a time, to individuals.

If you want to reach an individual, do you treat her like she's part of a group? How many individuals can you do this to before you start losing the interest of others who buy books for different reasons?

I know what you're thinking. It's impossible to personally reach thousands, let alone millions, of people. Right?

Wrong. Everyone who buys Patterson's latest thriller is doing it for a specific, individual reason. They aren't doing it because the publisher tells them to, or casts some magic spell. They aren't doing it because they're in touch with every single other Patterson reader, and all conspire, herd-like, to make him rich.

They're buying Patterson books as individuals, not en masse. But even though I write books similar to Patterson, and share some of his fanbase, he has many more fans than I do. This begs the question:

Does Patterson have the same type of fans as I do, only more? Or does Patterson have different types of fans than I do?

I believe the majority of his fans are different.
An author named Geoffrey A. Moore wrote a book called **Crossing the Chasm**, which is all about selling technology driven products. Moore believes that the majority of people who buy a product only do so after the 'early adopters' (15% of the buying public) embrace it. If they do, then early majority, late majority, and laggards (83% of the population) follow suit.

For the past few weeks, I've been thinking this is a pretty good model for the book biz, and explains why some books become major hits and others fail.

While books are sold one at a time, not all book buyers are created equal. There are tiers of importance.

1st Tier: The Diehards - These are the early adopters, the people who must embrace your book first before you can be a success. They include Booksellers, Librarians, Megafans (collectors, bloggers, voracious readers, people who help spread the word, family and friends) and the Media (reviewers, interviewers.) These buyers act like megaphones, offering information and recommendations to the other tiers to encourage them to try your books.

This group is targeted with advance reading copies, through book tours and library visits, through catalogs, through advertising, and through industry conventions and organizations (BEA, ABA, ALA, GLBA, etc.) A lot of time and money is spent to cultivate this group.

These are the people who the majority authors sell to. And depending on your print run, that might be enough to earn out your advance/have more than a 50% sell-through. But it won't be enough to make you rich and famous.

2nd Tier: Heavy Users - These folks account for a good portion of book buyers. They're readers who buy many books a year, and are actively looking for something new to read. They're influenced by the 1st Tier. Heavy Users usually stick to a specific genre because they know they enjoy it, and they value reading as one of their top ways to relax and be entertained.

A portion of this group attends conventions, visits bookstores, and spends time online looking for books and authors. They are targeted through advertising, conference appearances, and having a large online presence.

These are the people you need to 'break out' and have a shot at the bestseller lists.

3rd Tier: Casual Users - These also account for a good portion of book buyers, but they only buy books occasionally. These are the people who don't usually visit bookstores and don't necessarily value books as one of their main forms of entertainment. They read a few authors that they've enjoyed in the past, or they buy/receive books as gifts, or they only buy books when necessary (on vacation, at the airport, because a book was strongly recommended.)

This group is targeted with media and advertising. They aren't particularly interested in meeting authors, and they aren't online surfing writer websites. But their purchase power is necessary to have a mega bestseller.

4th Tier: Johnny Come Latelys - This is the group that only buys books after everyone else has bought them. They might not even read the books, but they don't want to miss out. These are the folks that make Harry Potter and The DaVinci Code into monster bestsellers.

In my next blog entry, I'll try to explain what authors and publishers should be doing to effectively reach each of these groups.

19 comments

One Book at a Time Part 2

This is the second part of a post I began **here**, all about the different types of people who buy books, and the reasons they buy.

In this entry, I'll be focusing on the things writers and publishers do to reach these groups, and how effective these things are.

1st Tier: The Diehards. They include Booksellers, Librarians, Megafans (collectors, bloggers, voracious readers, people who help spread the word, family and friends) and the Media (reviewers, interviewers.)

Here's how publishers try to reach these people:

- Distribute advance reading copies and galleys to reviewers, booksellers, librarians, and the media.
- Have a presence at trade shows (BEA, GLBA, ALA, ABA, etc.)
- Through house catalogs and distribution catalogs.
- Through their sales reps.
- Through their publicists, sending out press releases and materials.

Here's how authors try to reach these people:

- Though genre conventions and book fairs.
- By visiting libraries and bookstores on tour and for drop-in signings.
- Through targeted Internet activity, including email, message boards, MySpace, and newsletters (to those who sign up for the mailing list.)
- By contacting local media directly with a press kit and a hook.

What works?

All of this works (though getting media coverage is hardest) because the Diehards *are actively looking for books and authors.* It's much easier to find someone who is already seeking you out than it is to impress someone by cold-calling.

There may not be enough Diehards to make you a huge success, but these people deserve more of your time than any other group because they are megaphones who talk about your books, helping to spread positive word of mouth, and that relates to sales in excess of their numbers. Cultivate them. Treat them well. Thank them. Reward them. You need this 1st Tier if you expect to break out.

2nd Tier: Heavy Users - These folks account for a large portion of book buyers. They're readers who buy many books a year, and are actively looking for something new to read.

Here's how publishers try to reach these people:

- Advertising in trade and genre magazines.
- Securing reviews.
- Purchase coop placement in bookstores.
- Touring authors.
- Booking media appearances and interviews.

Here's how authors try to reach these people:

- Touring.
- Attending conferences and book fairs.
- Giving away materials (chapbooks, bookmarks, free books.)
- Mailing postcards.
- Advertising in trade and genre magazines.
- Public speaking.
- Maintaining a sticky website.
- Having a large Internet presence (responding to email, joining listservs and egroups, appearing in public forums, links, Wikipedia, Amazon Connect, MySpace, etc.)

What works?

Reviews sell books, but they are getting harder and harder to come by. Harder still is getting media coverage.

Ads may sell books (I remain skeptical) but not in proportion to what they cost —-a $1000 ad that sells 20 books can be called effective, but certainly not cost-effective.

Touring is also extremely cost-ineffective. While it's important to meet booksellers and fans, official signings are usually poorly attended.

Postcards are a big waste. I've gotten dozens of postcards from authors, and never bought a single book because of one.

Public speaking, in the right forum, can sell books. Keynote speaker spots are hard to get, but worthwhile, especially if they pay you to attend.

Giving away materials while at conventions or while touring is a loss leader, but can spread goodwill and name recognition.

The Internet is the cheapest way to reach people, but it's also a time black hole, and the majority of book buyers don't really care about author websites.

Coop placement works, and is arguably the best thing that can be done for a book. But it doesn't last, and can result in big returns and poor sell-through because bookstores order more copies. It's also pretty much beyond an author's control. And it might be beyond a publisher's control as well.

Though the more books an author has in print, the better off they generally are, the amount of books that do get printed isn't up to the author, or the publisher. It's up the the accounts.

The buyers (wholesale, not retail) determine how many books get printed, by placing orders with the sales reps. If your book doesn't have a lot of pre-orders, you simply won't get coop dollars.

3rd Tier: Casual Users - These also account for a large portion of book buyers, but they only buy books occasionally. These are the folks who buy books as gifts, or only buy bestselling authors, or only read one book a year while on vacation.

Here's how publishers try to reach these people:

- Advertising in national periodicals.
- TV and radio spots.
- Booking media appearances and interviews.

Here's how authors try to reach these people:

- Large public events (LA Times Festival of Books, Chicago Printer's Row Book Fair, etc.)
- Media coverage

What works?

Word of mouth. Of course, word of mouth works on all tiers, but the Diehards and Heavy Users are actively looking for books. The Casual Users don't read very much. Books aren't their main source of entertainment. Some don't read at all, and only go into a bookstore when looking to buy Uncle Earl something for Christmas ("He likes books about war," they'll tell the bookseller at the information desk.)

You can sell them books by meeting them in person, or you can spend gazillions of dollars on ads hoping that your name will stick in their minds that one time a year they go book shopping.

But the sad fact is, the only way to reach these people is to already be a bestseller. And since they account for a large number of books sold, newbie and midlist authors (and their publishers) should save the full page NYT ads and concentrate on finding buyers among the first two tiers.

4th Tier: Johnny Come Latelys - This is the group that only buys books after everyone else has bought them.

Here's how publishers try to reach these people:

- Even more ads.

Here's how authors try to reach these people:

- If an author is so successful that they are selling to this group, they are no longer trying to reach fans. They are in seclusion, hiding from fans.

What works?

Crossing your fingers and clicking your heels together. These buyers only purchase pop culture phenomenons, like HarryPotter, Stephen King, Dan Brown, and the bible.

Conclusions

After four years in this business, I've come to the conclusion that just about everything authors do is cost-ineffective, if you look at the direct benefits (book sales.)

But there are indirect benefits. The more people you meet and impress, the better off you are. Networking has far-reaching effects, giving you more opportunities to spread your brand.

Unfortunately, networking almost always has to be done in person, and requires a substantial time and money commitment on behalf of the author, with no guarantee of returns.

The goal is positive word-of-mouth. The author is the most effective spokesperson for a book, so the author has to bear much of the responsibility for getting out there and shaking hands with the world.

The publisher has to make sure the books are in print and distributed, and be willing to support an author until a tipping point is reached. The tipping point is when efforts are supported by sales, and there is a return on the time/money investment.

It may take years for the tipping point to come, if it ever comes at all.

I've long been against advertising, because I believe it is a lot of money spent for a tiny return.

The same can be said for touring. Or even single booksigning events. Or traveling to conventions and book fairs. It all costs a lot, and returns very little.

In fact, I'll go on the record and state that NOTHING an author can do will make an immediate, tangible difference in their career.

But the intangible benefits can add up.

The fact is, every person who meets you, and every person who reads you, has the potential to become a lifetime fan. The more people you meet, the more people you get to read you, the more potential fans you have.

You may not sell nearly enough books to cover the costs of a trip to Bouchercon, but you'll sell more books because of that than if you'd stayed home. This goes for everything you try, everything you do, to self-promote.

And let's say, after years of effort, you sold an extra 5000 books that wouldn't have sold normally. Not a lot. But those sales will lead to more sales, and the people you met will remember you when media and publicity opportunities arise, and if your publisher is smart they'll recognize your efforts and try to match them with efforts of their own.

- Yes, it involves a lot of hard work that may never pay off.
- Yes, luck plays a huge part.
- Yes, it's easy to get discouraged when every single thing you do looks like a failure from a cost-effectiveness standpoint.
- Yes, many of your peers are a lot more successful and don't do nearly as much promotion as you do.

No one said this would be fair, fun, or easy.

Your job is to write the best book you can, and then work to build an audience. There are no quick answers. Your books will sell one at a time.

How many of those one-at-a-time sales are you directly responsibly for?

34 comments

Why I Self-Promote

I think that many authors get discouraged because they work their butts off self-promoting, and don't see immediate benefits. How could they? The hardest working author in the world could maybe handsell ten thousand copies of a book in a year. That's an impressive number, but ultimately insignificant if he has 500k books in print.

When I say, "You should self promote," some authors immediately go into defensive mode. Their arguements usually come down to:

"It's the publisher's job to sell books, not mine."

Or

"You can be successful without self-promoting."

Or

"I'd rather focus on writing a good book."

Or

"Prove to me that self-promotion makes you successful."

Or

"I tried and it didn't work."

Or a combination of the above. Justification for our actions (or non actions) is essential for our self-esteem.

But that justification should be well thought out. All options should be carefully considered before a path is chosen. And that path should be subject to change, as more evidence comes into play.

I've spent a good deal of time contemplating the publishing business. Along with contemplating, I've experimented. I made some observations, and drew some conclusions, based on my experience (which I tried to make as broad as possible.)

I've found that:

1. Publishing, as a business model, is a poor one.

2. No one in publishing really knows what they're doing, because you can't learn from unreproduceable phenomenon.

3. Taste is subjective. A "good" book means different things to different people.

4. People would rather defend their actions than analyze them.

5. Luck plays an overwhelming part in success. This is scary, because it is beyond our control. So most publishers, and authors, would rather erroneously attribute success to their hard work and efforts, talent, and business savvy.

6. There are no guarantees, except for one: The more you self promote, the more books you'll sell, and the more you'll increase your luck.

So, what can an author do to better their career?

1. I can't change the publishing world, even though it's broken. That's beyond my control.

2. I can't learn from unreproduceable phenomenon any more than my publisher can, and I don't have the resources to run controlled tests, surveys, focus groups, and scientifically analyze the system to learn what works and what doesn't. It's beyond my control.

3. I can write the best book I can, but that's no guarantee of anything. Many good books fail. A lot of crap sells really well. Taste is subjective, and there is no objective scale that can rate books based on their merit.

4. I can learn from my actions and be open to new ideas, but can't expect anyone else to have that same attitude.

5. I can recognize that success comes down to luck, as scary as that is.

6. I can do what I can to improve my luck. That means writing good books (which is subjective) and spreading the word about my books, which is objective.

So basically, what I've learned in the past five years is that the only real control an author has is how many books they can sell by self-promotion. That's the only way we can empower ourselves.

Beware a sense of entitlement. Beware believing that hard work and/or talent is more important than luck. Beware believing that your success or failure is a direct result of anything you've done. These beliefs don't lead to anything healthy.

There's no fairness. No dues that must be paid. No deserving success.

There's only getting lucky, and what you can do to maximize your luck.

That's why I spend so much time self-promoting.

24 comments

Why You Shouldn't Blog

Stop blogging. It's a giant waste of time.

It's 2009. If you're a writer, you already have a website, and you probably have a Facebook page and a MySpace page. Maybe you Twitter. Maybe you're LinkedIn. There are other social networks as well; Shelfari, Goodreads, LibraryThing, RedRoom, Crimespace, and more appearing every month.

It's obvious why we have websites: they're 24 hour ads for our books.

Granted, the best websites are more than just ads. A good author site provides information and entertainment, with things to offer fans and readers other than a giant beacon the blinks BUY ME!!! over and over.

The social networking sites also serve a purpose. Linking like-minded surfers together allows writers to be discovered. Anyone who looks for JA Konrath will find me easily; that's not a victory. But if someone is on a friend's Facebook page, sees I'm also a friend, clicks over to my Facebook page, clicks over to my website... you get the picture.

Your website is for people who are already looking for you. Social networks allow people to meet you while they're looking for something else.

But why the hell are we blogging?

As an experiment, visit your top ten favorite blogs. Read a month's worth of posts, and then read the comments.

Chances are high the same 200 people are the ones commenting on every single mystery writer blog on the Internet.

This isn't gaining new fans.

This is incest.

So why do we bother? Why do we keep wracking our brains to come up with ideas for blog posts that are read by the same 200 people who buy our books anyway?

Is it because we think we have to blog? Because our publishers tell us to? Because we have no control over our book sales, so we might as well try do do something?

Why are we doing this? Do the majority of our readers even know what a blog is? Is this just a writer substitute for water cooler conversation, because our professions are so solitary?

Be brutally honest: If you stopped blogging, would anyone actually care?

The answer, surprisingly, is yes.

Yes, your blog is helpful. Yes, your blog is needed. Yes, you should continue blogging.

It's natural to think that you're just spinning your wheels. It's normal to doubt that your words are having any effect at all. And if you use a tracker, like FeedJit or Statcounter, you might even think you have the low numbers to prove how useless this blogging thing is.

But it isn't useless. And here are some reasons why.

1. Self-promotion is intangible. Unless we physically put a book in a reader's hand and watch them buy it, we don't see the effect we have on our own sales. But we do have an effect. I know this for a fact, because I'm on this blog tour, and every time I post someplace new I watch my Amazon numbers spike.

2. The Internet is permanent. Your words on your blog can be Googled three years later. Every time you blog, it's one more road that leads to you. That means more chances to be discovered. It's cumulative.

3. Blogging isn't really incest. Sure, the same people comment over and over, but the ones that really count are the lurkers. The people who visit, but don't post comments. You have them. You probably have a lot more than you think.

4. It's helpful. We were all newbie writers once. Sharing what we've learned, giving back to the community that helped to spawn us, is just good karma.

So next time you think blogging is useless, that no one cares, that you're wasting your time, I point you to a lowly midlist writer who never got front-of-store coop, never got a large promotional tour, never got an advertising budget. But his seven novels are all still in print, and if you Google his name you get over 60,000 hits.

That writer is Stephen King.

Ha! Kidding! That writer is me, JA Konrath.

Now run out and buy all my books. The new one is called AFRAID, written by my pen name, Jack Kilborn, and it comes out March 31.

How Do I Self-Promote?

My name is Joe Konrath. Under the name JA Konrath, I've written six books in the Lt. Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels series. The latest, Cherry Bomb, comes out July 7. Under the name Jack Kilborn, I've written a horror novel called Afraid, which is coming out March 31.

Over the years I've done a lot of self-promotion. A whole lot. I've mailed out 7000 letters to libraries, visited over 1200 bookstores, spoken at over a hundred conventions, book fairs, and libraries, and published more than 70 short stories and articles, all since 2004.

My blog, A Newbie's Guide to Publishing, gets a few hundred thousand hits per year. I've been nominated for a bunch of awards, and have won a few. I've been reviewed by some major publications, and a slew of smaller ones. I've been on the radio. I've been on local TV. My books are available in ten different languages, and there are over half a million of them in print.

A question I get asked all the time is: What is the best form of self-promotion?

On the surface, it's a simple question. But it's actually a tougher than it looks, for several reasons.

Rarely, if ever, will your self-promotional efforts pay for themselves in books sold. Traveling to a convention and selling a hundred books–while spectacular–still won't cover the cost it took to get to the convention.

Self-promotion has varying degrees of success, based largely on luck. Something that worked really well for you one year might not work at all the next year, even though you did the same exact thing.

The intangible effects of self-promotion are hard to gauge. I can say, for sure, that I've handsold about 15,000 books in my career. But I'm probably responsible, either directly or indirectly, for many more sales. I just didn't witness those sales firsthand, so I can't truly judge the effects my promotional techniques are having.

That said, I do have a few self-promo tips that I'm fairly sure work, and work well. As always, your results may vary. But keep in mind that promotion is an ongoing, cumulative process. It keeps building on itself.

Books sell one at a time. If you consistently follow these techniques, you will sell more books. Whether you'll sell them fast enough or in quantities large enough to justify your efforts is something only you can answer. But remember that each book you have a hand in selling is one book that might not have ever sold. Also keep in mind that selling a book to a reader who loves it means you are selling more than just a single book; you're selling every book you ever write, because you've made a fan.

Here are things you should be doing:

1. Sell Short Stories. It never ceases to amaze me how many novelists ignore the short form. Chances are, unless you're already a bestseller, most magazines and anthologies will have print runs higher than your novels do. Selling a short story is a chance to reach a lot of readers, and to win them over with your writing. Best of all, this form of self-promotion earns you money, rather than costs you money.

I've been in a few big magazines and high-profile anthologies, and a lot of people have discovered my books after first discovering me through a short.

2. Provide Internet Content. People are looking for two things on the net; information and entertainment. They aren't looking for advertising.

If your website or blog is just a big commercial, it will be ignored.

But if it offers, for free, compelling and constantly updated content, surfers will find you. Even more importantly, they'll find you through the content, not through your name. Anyone who already knows you can find you on the world wide web–that's not a victory. Your goal is to get people to find you when they're looking for something else.

3. Link. The more people you can trade links with, the higher your Google ranking, the easier it is for folks to discover you.

4. Meet. Any time you have the opportunity to meet booksellers, librarians, media people, and fans, take the opportunity. A handshake and an autograph can create a supporter for life. Travel is expensive, and exhausting, but it's still the best way to make a memorable impression.

5. Learn to Speak in Public. The better you are, the more books you'll sell. Period.

6. Sign. Drop in as many bookstores as possible and sign stock. Meeting booksellers will help them remember your books, and help them handsell your titles to folks looking for your genre. Many booksellers say a signed book is a sold book, because it offers added value to a purchase, and is often then displayed more prominently than unsigned stock.

7. Media. It's hard to get publicity if you're a novelist, unless you're already a bestseller. But everyone with a blog is a potential reviewer. Lots of folks have podcasts and are looking for interviews. I'm currently on a blog tour, which I set up myself. This blog tour cost me zero dollars, I set it up quickly and easily without using a publicist, and it seems to be benefiting me (you can follow the tour on my blog, http://jakonrath.blogspot.com). TV and radio and interviews in People Magazine are wonderful. But you can help spread brand-awareness and name-recognition by yourself, and reach a lot of people while doing it, just by using your own contacts.

8. Other Authors. This isn't a competition. My fans can be your fans, and vice-versa. So it's important to help each other. Than means blurbing, recommending each other's books, sharing anthology and speaking opportunities, and basically paying it forward. We're all in the same boat. We all should be rowing hard.

These are forms of self-promotion that have worked for me, and that will likely work for you as well. Of course, if you found this helpful, you can thank me by buying 47 copies of Afraid when it comes out March 31.

The Cumulative Effect

My name is Joe Konrath. Under the name JA Konrath, I write a series of thrillers featuring Chicago Homicide cop Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels. The sixth book, Cherry Bomb, is being released in July. Under the name Jack Kilborn, I write horror novels. Afraid, which might be the most frightening book ever written, is being released March 31.

Over the years, I've done my share of self-promotion. I even have a blog dedicated to the subject, called A Newbie's Guide to Publishing.

One of the things I'm just starting to figure out, after six years in the biz, is the cumulative effect.

Advertising knows that repetition leads to sales. People have to hear a product's name time and time again before it begins to stick in their minds. They also have to try a product repeatedly before they become brand loyal. That's why successful brands like Coke and McDonalds continue to advertise even though everyone on the planet knows them; they want to stay at the forefront of their customers' minds.

Books, like hamburgers and soda, are products. It is in a writer's best interest to make as many people aware of their books as possible, and to turn as many of those people as possible into fans.

We do many things to try to make this happen. Besides writing good books, we spend a lot of time meeting librarians, booksellers, media folks, and fans. We spend a lot of time on the Internet, blogging and keeping up with social networks. We spend a lot of time writing stories and articles for anthologies, magazines, and websites, getting our name out there.

The cumulative effect comes into play when our previous efforts begin to compound our current efforts. It's easy to compare self-promotion to working out on a Stairmaster —we work our butts off just to stay in one place. But the fact is, it's more analogous to mountain climbing. And like mountain climbing, it seems like we might never reach the summit.

But each step does bring us closer to that elusive summit. Just as everything we do to self-promote can build upon the previous thing.

Every book you sell can lead people to you. If a stranger buys a book, reads it, and becomes a fan, that's great. But that stranger can also tell others about you, leading to more fans. Libraries and used book stores mean each book sold can reach several, perhaps hundreds, of new readers. The more books you have in print, the more chances readers have to discover you. If they discover you early in your career, they can follow you. If they discover you later in your career, they can go back and find your previous books.

Every short story, review, article, and interview you have in print can lead people to you. Anthologies and magazines are a great way to spread name-recognition and brand awareness. They allow you to reach new demographics.

Everything you do on the internet lasts forever. A good portion of people reading this are doing so soon after it was posted. But some of you found your way here weeks, months, maybe even years after these

words were written. Whenever you appear on the net, you leave footprints that people can follow to where you are now. The more footprints you leave, the greater your chances of being found.

Events lead to events. A successful speaking engagement will be talked about, and can lead to requests for more speeches. Doing a good job on a radio interview can lead to others. The more you get out there, the more you get out there.

Little steps lead to big accomplishments. If you set minor daily goals, they become major accomplishments over time. Adding five Facebook friends a day means you'll have 1825 by the end of the year. But you'll actually have more than that, because people will find you and ask for your friendship. Collecting email addresses for your newsletter, blogging regularly so more people follow you, networking and linking to peers —this all begins to pay off and eventually snowball.

But for that snowball, you have to follow the Four Stays:

Stay in Print. The more books you have that are available to the public, the better off you are. The more stories and articles you sell, the more people you reach.

Stay Current. Make sure your website and social networks are up to date, and that you're constantly putting new content on the net.

Stay in Touch. Keep networking with fans, peers, librarians, booksellers, and the media, and make sure you're easily accessible.

Stay Open-minded. Without a willingness to try new things, you'll probably get stuck in a rut, and you'll definitely miss out on hot trends.

The key here is to survive long enough to catch on with the general population. The longer you survive, the likelier it is you'll be successful. It may take years. It may take decades. But if you keep building an audience, momentum will eventually take over and your audience will start to build itself.

That's how you climb mountains. One step at a time.

The Call to Action

Today I'm talking about cause and effect. Specifically, what authors can do to motivate people to action.

Actions can include posting a blog comment, signing up for a newsletter, ordering your book online, of getting them to come to one of your signings. Any time an author makes a suggestion that people follow, it is a successful call to action.

Step 1: Offer

When you're a writer, it isn't about what you're selling. No only likes to be sold a book, and they generally don't like people who try to sell them things.

It's about what you're offering. And if you're ever heard me speak before, you know that people are looking for two things: Information and entertainment. Before you even think about trying to motivate someone, you first need to establish the fact that you're here to give, not take. If you're offering free, relevant content, you've already gotten off on the right foot. That makes the next step much easier.

Step 2: Ask

A call to action requires you to actually make a call. This means you have to ask your audience to do something. It could be to buy your book, but it isn't easy to make someone —someone who moments ago might have been a complete stranger —part with $6.99, or $13.99, or $24.99.

But you'll never get anywhere in life unless you ask, so ask you must.

Being pushy or demanding isn't an effective way to motivate. When I'm using cause and effect, I stick with three basic techniques:

* Be friendly
* Be funny
* Emphasize benefits, not cost

Being friendly is more than just smiling and saying nice things. People can spot an impostor. You must be genuine.

Being funny is harder, because different people laugh at different things, and some people have no sense of humor. But I find that if you can make people laugh, they're more open to suggestion.

One of the most effective calls to action I use involves immediate benefits. Contests, freebies, incentives, and other actions that provide all benefit and no cost will give you your greatest cause and effect successes.

Step 3: Listen

Cause and effect isn't a one-way street. If you want people to do what you ask of them, you'd better be able to listen to them.

Knowing what people want means paying attention to their needs. Everyone wants to be heard, and the topic a person is most likely to talk about is themself. Feedback and dialog are essential, and you must make yourself accessible and approachable.

Step 4: Easy

Once you ask something, make it easy for people to do what you're asking. If you want comments on your blog, make it easy for them to comment, without having to jump through hoops. If you want people to sign up for your newsletter, make it easy to find on your website, with a box people can add their email address. If you want to sell books, have a link nearby that gives them buying options.

The simpler it is for people to react, the more that will.

Let's use a real life example, based on my recent blog tour. If you're just tuning in, I'm appearing on different blogs every day in March to promote my horror novel, Afraid.

I have a website where I offer free entertainment. You can play games, watch videos, and get free ebook downloads. My blog provides information about publishing, more than 300,000 words worth.

So I've established a fanbase network by offering good, updated content. People seek me out.

So now I've got a new book coming out, and I wanted to use this network I've built to help me sell some copies. So I asked two things: Do you want to review my new book, and do you want me have me guest post on your blog? I did this using my blog, newsletter, and social networking sites.

In both cases, I'm asking for action. For reviews, I offered free copies of my book. For blogs, I offered to send my blog readers to the blogs I visit, bumping up traffic on these sites.

Obviously, I'm getting benefits from reviews and guest blogs, but I emphasized the benefits these people helping me are receiving.

I made myself available for folks to get in touch with me, if they wanted to do reviews or host me, and then listened to what I could do for them. As a result, I got several hundred emails from people who wanted to be a part of this.

To hold up my end, I sent out a bunch of free books, I'm linking to all blogs and reviews, and I'm urging my readers to follow these blogs I visit.

Win-win.

The best calls to action are always win-win. I've heard it said that sales isn't about selling something to someone who doesn't want it. It's about discovering the people who are specifically looking for what you have to offer.

So now I have a question for you. What other techniques do you find work to motivate people.

Very Bad Self Promotion Tips

My name is Jack Kilborn. I'm currently on a blog tour promoting the release of my horror novel, AFRAID, which hits stores March 31.

Over the course of this tour, I've picked up a lot of really bad sales techniques that I'd like to share. If you're an author, here are some ways you shouldn't sell your book.

#1 – Threats

Example: "Buy my book, or I'll track you down and set your house on fire."

Why it doesn't work: While extortion is an unavoidable part of everyday life, I don't believe Stephen King or JK Rowling threatened anyone with arson in order to hit the bestseller list.

#2 – Begging

Example: "Please please please buy my book, because I'm all out of money and my children are starving and they cut off our electricity and we all got frostbite and have had to self-amputate eleven toes so far."

Why it doesn't work: Pity works for charities. Your book is not a charity.

#3 – Nagging

Example: "Dear Facebook friends!!! This is just another hourly reminder to inform you that my book comes out in 182 days!!!! You'll be able to pre-order it on Amazon sometime next month! I'm soooo excited!! I love exclamation points!!!

Why it doesn't work: A few gentle reminders are okay, but if you're bugging people more than twice a month, you aren't going to stimulate a buying frenzy. You'll stimulate a hate-fest.

#4 – Pushiness

Example: "I can't help but notice that you're buying some canned ham. I've taken the liberty of placing a copy of my latest book in your shopping cart as well, because I'm sure you'll love it just as much."

Why it doesn't work: People don't want to be sold anything, and the hardsell is especially off-putting. The less pushy you are, the better.

#5 – Non-Sequitur

Example: "Thanks for seeing me, Doctor. The rash appeared a few days ago. Also, my new book is coming out next week."

Why it doesn't work: Most people don't care you wrote a book, so you don't need to worm that factoid into every single conversation you have.

#6 – Swag

Example: "To promote my new paperback novel, which earns me sixty cents in royalties every time one sells, I've printed the book cover on these original Prada bags and am giving them away to 5000 people.

Why it doesn't work: Seems like a bit of a loss lead. But even things like bookmarks, postcards, keychains, and magnets all wind up costing more than you'll actually earn if the people you give them to all buy your book–and they won't all buy your book.

#7 – Bragging

Example: "This is the best book ever written. You'll love it so much you'll want to buy me dinner when you're finished reading it. You might as well buy 17 copies now, because you'll want to give them to everyone you know. And of course I'll sign them for you."

Why it doesn't work: Confidence is sexy. Cockiness makes people want to mace you. Leave the reviews to other people.

#8 – Nothing

Example: "I don't need to do anything to help sell my book. That's my publisher's job."

Why it doesn't work: You're living in a fairytale land with magic elves and cotton candy rainbows. It's your name on the spine. If you don't help sell a few copies, you won't ever have your name on a spin again, but I'm betting your publisher will still be in business.

#9 – Lies

Example: "You say you only read books about talking horses who like jazz? That's one of the best scenes in my novel!

Why it doesn't work: You may get people to buy it, but ultimately you'll tick them off when they discover you're a dishonest sack of talking horse manure. Also, jazz kinda sucks.

So what does work?

I'm a fan of writing entertaining blog posts, then leaving a link to my homepage if people want to find out more about me and my books. Like this one: http://www.jackkilborn.com.

Hope some of you drop by. I have a lot of fun freebies on my site. It also cures cancer and will help you get the sexy body you want while giving you winning lottery numbers.

Okay, I'm stretching the truth a bit about the cancer part…

Six Things to Avoid in Self-Promotion

1. Mailings. Snail mail is expensive and ineffective, in my experience. And my experience is extensive. I once mailed letters to 7000 libraries. It did very little for my sales, but cost a fortune, and took a very long time.

2. Book Trailers. Unless you can do them really cheap, like I did, your money is better spent traveling to bookstores.

3. Bookmarks. Cheap ones get thrown away. Expensive ones aren't worth the cost, even if the person buys your book because of it, which they won't. Stick with business cards. I'd also apply this to anything else you can give away; key chains, pencils, candy, etc. If you want to give away something effective, give away chapbooks that feature the first chapter of your story. Hook them with your writing, not with a tsotchkes

4. Ads. In some niche markets, if the price is right, and ad can be helpful. But in my experience it is a waste of money 95% of the time.

5. Conferences. This is a tricky one, because I think most conferences are worth going to every so often. But if you go to the same con, year after year, you're spending a lot of time and money preaching to the converted. Better to try different conferences, rather than speak in front of the same 300 people over and over again.

6. A Publicist. If you have a non-fiction book, or a specific platform, a publicist can be helpful. If you write fiction, there isn't much a publicist can do for you that's worth your investment. You can find the radio interviews and reviews on your own, and save a bunch of money. For the record, I don't recommend paying anyone for anything in this biz, except your agent, who should only be paid when she sells your writing.

The key thing to keep in mind when doing any sort of promotion is: "Would this make me buy a book?" Don't do anything that wouldn't work on you.

Also don't blindly listen to experts, me included. It's your career. You need to find your own path. That means trying as many things as possible, to find out what works for you.

And remember to have fun, because we're certainly not doing this for the money...

Library Events

Because I have zero planning skills, I had to fly back to Chicago in the middle of my tour to speak at the Reaching Forward conference for Illinois libraries.

And since I've been going non-stop for 14 days, I haven't written a speech yet.

It's been a while since I've posted actual advice on this blog, so I decided to kill two birds with one stone and write the speech and my blog at the same time.

The name of my speech is Author Library Events: What Authors Want. But I'm taking that as a jumping-off point to explain how author events can be successful.

Libraries are more than book and video rental stores. They're hubs for the their communities. Books don't make a good library. People do. And an author event is a great way to bring people together.

FINDING AUTHORS

If your library wants to sponsor an author event, the first step is recruiting authors. Writing conventions are the best way to do this. Nothing beats face-to-face contact. Ask your boss to send you to writing conventions. When they stop laughing, pay for the trip yourself, and remember to write it off on your taxes as a work-related expense.

Approaching authors is easy. If you begin your sentence with, "I love your work" then you've already got a captive audience. Introduce yourself, and your library, and ask if they'd like to speak for you. If they're somewhat receptive, get their card (or their email) and give them yours.

This is a good time to talk about paying authors. I've discovered that you get what you pay for. Most famous and semi-famous authors are asked to speak all the time, and they charge speaking fees. These can range from a few hundred to several thousand dollars.

If you've got thousands of dollars in your events budget, go after some bigger authors. They'll also want their travel expenses paid for. Is this excessive? Perhaps. But the writers that are good at this sort of thing are usually worth what they're paid.

I usually charge between $300 and $1500 to do a speech, plus expenses. I've taken less if the library is nearby, or if I'm friends with the librarian.

Often a library is hesitant to make a monetary offer, worried it will be insulting because it is low. I say, "Go ahead, insult me." If I'm interested, we can always negotiate. And like any good negotiator, your first offer should be lower than what you're actually willing to pay.

Usually, I'm happy taking an average of the last three speaker fees they've paid.

If you don't have a budget, you can still get authors, but they'll be of a slightly lower caliber. For example, for free you can get the guy who self-published his Print On Demand book "I Can Fit My Whole Fist Up My Butt." If you book him, remember not to shake his hand.

OTHER PLACES TO FIND AUTHORS

Besides meeting authors in person, meeting them online is a good way to recruit them. Every author has contact information through their website. Authors are also on many social networking sites, such as Facebook, LibraryThing, Goodreads, Shelfari, Twitter, MySpace, and so on.

A typical offer would list the type of event it is, the date, what you can pay, and what you expect the author to do.

Flexibility is important. The more flexible you are with your dates, the more likely you'll be able to get authors. Authors have deadlines, and travel a lot, and I often have to turn down events because I'm doing another one. So if you need to book a lecture room months in advance, request several days and give the author some options.

It's important to mention that you should NEVER book an author without having seen them speak in public. Most authors suck at public speaking, and these are often the ones most anxious to speak. If you've never met them in person, try to find them on YouTube.

WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM THE AUTHOR

Content is king.

Library patrons are looking for two things: Information and entertainment.

Simply booking an author for a signing isn't going to draw much of a crowd, unless the author is a huge bestseller.

In other words, it isn't enough just to buy the monkey. Now the monkey has to perform.

What are some types of events I've done?

BOOK FAIRS. These are often a collection of authors, and usually an annual event. The key to a successful book fair is to get a great keynote, who you'll probably have to pay for. But you'll also get all of your local authors who will come out for free.

BOOK CLUBS. I speak at a lot of book clubs. If I can't be there in person, I'll talk to the club via conference call. Most authors will do this, and none of them, me included, charge for this.

HOW TO. I lecture a lot about how to get published. Since every community has newbie writers, this is always a good bet. Other lectures can focus on the writer's area of expertise. Raymond Benson successfully lectures at libraries about movies, something he knows very well, having been a writer of James Bond novels. Michael A. Black and Dave Case, both cops and authors, have a crime scene presentation.

PUBLICITY

Should you advertise on radio or in the local paper? I say no. I'm not convinced paid advertising gets people to come to events, and I think your money is best spent elsewhere, like on snacks. Or beer. (Yes, I've done library events that had an open bar. The turnout was amazing.)

Here's what you should do instead:

Contact the local media for free publicity. Most papers and some radio stations list community events.

Ask the book club and writer's group to read the author's book prior to the event.

Print up some cheap flyers and hand these out to patrons checking out books a week before the event.

Posters are nice, if you can get them cheap. Flyers posted on every wall works just as well.

Your website and email list should promote the event. Ask the author to use his net contacts as well.

HOLD A CONTEST/GIVE AWAY FREE STUFF

If you've been burned before with low attendance, even though you had decent, name authors, then you need to think about stepping up the program.

People love free stuff and give-aways. Someone on the fence about attending the event might decide to come if attendees can win something.

It can be something donated by library patrons or sponsors —a night in a bed and breakfast, a free hair style, an oil change, round trip tickets to Mexico with complimentary face masks to ward off the swine flu, etc.

It can also be free books, supplied by you or the author. Some authors will donate a character name. The sky is the limit, but contests and freebies do bring people in.

THE EVENT

The day finally arrives. You make sure the chairs are set up, the sound system works, there are plenty of cookies and coffee, and then you cross your fingers and hop the author and some patrons show up.

If the author doesn't show up, for whatever reason, have a back up plan. That's why a contest is nice —in case something happens, your patrons won't hate you.

If no patrons show up, the author might feel a bit stung, but a stipend takes much of the bite out of that. You'll probably feel the need to apologize, but all smart authors know that it isn't your fault, that these things happen, and they should be kissing your butt for thinking of them in the first place.

Then, of course, inflate your numbers on the report so your budget doesn't get cut.

But if you've followed the proper procedure, chances are you'll have a decent turn out, and everyone will have a good time. Be sure to collect email addresses from people who show up, so you can inform them about upcoming events. If the author had a good time, ask them to suggest other authors for you.

Any questions?

3 comments

Self Promotion Quickies

Eight Low Cost Self-Promotion Strategies.

1. Social Networks. You can use Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, Friendster, Goodreads, LibraryThing, and scores of other online gathering places, to make friends and fans. The key is to offer content in the form of information and entertainment. If you go there to sell, you'll be ignored. But if you go to share, you'll be embraced.

2. Blogging. This is still the best way to provide regularly updated content and reach a specific demographic. Make sure your blog has focus, and stick to that focus to build a readership. When you've built up your readership, I recommend going on a blog tour. I think it's a terrific way to spread the word.

3. Visit Bookstores. If they have your books, sign stock. If they don't, ask a manager if they could order a few. Talking to booksellers helps them to handsell you, meaning your books will continue to sell after the signed copies are long gone.

4. Sell Short Stories and Articles. The best way to get people to read your writing is if you get them to try your writing. Selling shorts to magazines and anthologies is a way to reach a broader audience and give them a taste; the literary equivalent of giving out free samples in supermarkets. Best of all, you get pain, not the other way around.

5. Giveaways. Contests for free swag are great. Having free short stories and novels on your website, for download, are even better.

6. Networking. The more people you meet, and trade email and links with, the better off you'll be. Like all businesses, publishing runs on nepotism. Befriending people, both in real life and on the net, just makes sense.

7. Library Visits. If you're big enough, they'll pay you. It doesn't hurt to ask. (If you're unsure of what you're worth, ask for the average they paid their last three speakers.) Getting in front of people is powerful juju — but make sure you're good at speaking in public.

8. Email Newsletters. Every time you do an appearance, collect email addys. You should also collect them on your website. Then, when your next book is coming out, you can email them all at once.

The Game

Just got back from Bouchercon, and had one of those revelation moments.

When I play, I play to win. That's the point for me. If I lose, I try to learn from it so I can win next time.

Traditional publishing is a game where I'm not allowed to win.

I suppose this is rather obvious. There are too many factors involved —luck being one of the biggies —that are out of my control.

But if I look at my writing career, I've done my best to have as much control as possible. I was the guy who sent out 7000 letters to libraries, who visited over 2000 bookstores, who blog toured over 100 sites in a single month, who gathered 10,000+ names for his newsletter, who talked about social networking before anyone knew what Facebook was.

I think all of this has had a positive effect on my career. I've made some money. I'm still selling books.

But even with my best effort, and with all I've learned, I'm not allowed to win.

Winning involves big print runs and marketing campaigns and distribution. No matter how hard I try, or how well I play the game, those things aren't up to me.

So along comes ebooks.

For the first time, there's a level-playing field. It's no longer about who has 200 copies of their latest hardcover on the Borders New Release table for five weeks at 40% off cover price. It's no longer about huge New York Times ads, or getting a review in People magazine. It's no longer about being available at every Walgreens and CVS.

I have no idea if I'll be able to win the ebook game. There are still a lot of factors involved.

But it's nice to finally feel like I actually have a chance to compete.

53 comments

Promotion, Social Networks, and Going Viral

As I've said many times in the past, getting people to find you on the world wide web is no major feat if they're looking for you in the first place.

Sure, you should have a website, and assorted billboards that point to your website (like social networks and blogs), but if someone Googles your name and finds you, you really haven't won any major battles.

The goal is to get people to find you when they're looking for something else. When that happens, you're spreading your brand.

As long as I've been on the Internet, I've been playing around with various ways to get people to find me while looking for something else.

The pinnacle of this idealogy would be to do something that went viral —that spread word-of-mouth and captured millions of viewers.

Hasn't happened yet. Might never happen. But I have thought about it.

For as long as I've had a website, I've been giving away free ebooks. They've been downloaded tens of thousands of times, and recently the frequency is picking up. But I haven't gotten huge volumes of new surfers because I give away ebooks. It's worthwhile, but hardly viral.

I've played with videos a few times, releasing my video to Hyperion on Youtube a few years ago, and last year doing a book trailer for Fuzzy Navel. All total, these have been watched about 5000 times. Not viral at all.

I went heavy into MySpace a few years ago, getting more than 12,000 friends. Then MySpace started to suck, so I spend my effort on Facebook and Twitter. I have a few thousand friends on those, but I'm not a "must see" destination, even though I try to make my daily updates amusing.

I put a funny little Flash game on the Jack Kilborn website, to promote Afraid. It's gotten over 1600 hits, but that's far from viral.

My goal, from the beginning, was to do something that encorages word-of-mouth. Something funny, different, goofy, and unique enough to stand out, while still resonating with the majority of people who see it. I've tried to do this with my writing, from the very start. My books, named after drinks (hook) are funny and scary (hook.) Easy to remember titles + a unique approach to thrillers.

They've caught on, but not virally. It's tough to reach a large audience when you've never had coop, or been in Wal-mart.

With Afraid, I didn't try to write a horror novel. I tried to write the scariest novel of all time. Did a blog tour (a hundred blogs in a month this March), which lead to better sales than my previous books, and over a hundred ratings on Amazon. But again, it didn't set the world on fire.

I wrote a novella with Blake Crouch called SERIAL, and that's the closest thing to viral I've done. I haven't seen the latest numbers, but I estimate it has had over 200,000 downloads. Nice, but it hasn't made Jack Kilborn a household name.

Keep in mind, aiming for viral is a lot like buying a lottery ticket. You can try, but don't have high expectations it's going to work. The stars have to align.

Still, the key word is "try."

My detractors (and I have a few) will often point to the many things I've done to promote my writing and say, "But all that didn't make you a bestseller."

I never thought it would. But I knew I'd sell more books by trying than by doing nothing, and the more I try, the more I do sell.

Which brings me to a new experiment.

Two days ago, I listed an auction on eBay for signed copies of all of my books. I've mentioned it on Twitter and Facebook, and now I'm mentioning it here.

There have been eBay auctions that have attained viral status, either by selling something outrageous (like a Dorito that looks like Michael Jackson), or by using a funny description. My old high school friend Dawn Meehan sold a baseball on eBay in a humorous way, which lead to a blog, an appearance on Good Morning America, and a book deal. She went viral, using only her wit.

So I decided to give it a shot. The main goal of the auction isn't to sell the books. It's to introduce people to my sarcastic brand of humor. The product description is essentially 500 jokes.

The point, of course, isn't to be viewed by people who alreayd know me. It's to be viewed by folks who had no clue who I was before looking at the auction.

So far, I've had over 200 hits on the eBay auction. That's a lot of hits for eBay, but nowhere near viral.

Here's the auction link: **http://tiny.cc/JeuuU**.

Feel free to check it out, and spread the word. I'm really curious to see if being a smartass, coupled with the social networks I'm already involved in, can translate to a lot of traffic, both on eBay, and by extension, on my website.

Worst case scenario: I sell some books.

Best case scenario: Billions of people visit the auction, leading to my being elected ruler of the world, where I will encourage public nudity and legalize drugs.

Please do your part to help.

14 comments

My eBay Auction

I'm thriller writer Joe Konrath, and this is a signed collection of just about everything I've written.

Aren't you lucky.

You might be asking, "Joe, why are you selling your signed books on eBay? Are you that strapped for cash?"

The answer is: no. But my house has become a library filled with multiple copies of my books, and my wife said if I don't get rid of some of them she's going to withhold sex. Now, I've been married for 13 years, so normally I just wait until she falls asleep. But this is the holiday season, and in the spirit of giving (or some crap like that) I bowed to her wishes and decided to put some books up on eBay. Which is what you're reading right now (and if you're one of my fans, chances are good your moving your lips while reading this. But I digress.)

Plus, I admit that I'm curious. The retail price of these books is well over $300. Since they're signed, they're worth about half that. But part of me wonders if I've achieved such a level of fame and infamy that some dumb noob will pay thousands of dollars for this set, with the intent of hoarding it away until I'm hugely famous, and then selling it for the $150 it's probably worth.

BTW, if you don't know who I am, now is a good time to check me out at my website, www.jakonrath.com. I also have a blog. Google me. You're also welcome to become one of my 10,000 MySpace Friends, but let's be real: MySpace sucks these days. All the cool kids are on FaceBook. You can friend me there as well, or follow me on Twitter.

People love me on Twitter. That's because I write tweets like these:

The laxatives don't work. I'm on my 2nd box of Ex-Lax, but I think jamming all those pills up my unhappy place is making the problem worse.

There's more to life than having sex and taking drugs. There's also voyeurism, watching others having sex and taking drugs.

I think the patella is the worst bone in the human body, but that's probably just a knee jerk reaction.

I'm totally sick of all these superficial women with their tight bodies and fake boobs and collagen lips not having sex with me.

As far as cheeses went, this was pretty Gouda. But I was hoping for grater.

At first I thought a bus station washroom was a terrible place for a rectal exam. But I really couldn't argue with the $10 price.

I will no longer stand for any more pornography. So now I sit down for it, or sometimes recline.

I never get scared. Before a situation becomes scary, I run away.

Six moral majority leaders were arrested today for destroying $65,500 worth of computer hardware while trying to burn ebooks.

I wrote a book about assassination. It will be a hit. They're selling it exclusively at Target. The reviews have been killer.

I wrote a book about prison. It will be released in three to five years.

I wrote a book about acne. I think it will be my breakout book.

I wrote a book about massage techniques. It's got a happy ending.

I wrote a book about bees. It's generating a lot of buzz. But a lot of the reviews have really stung.

I admit it. I'm addicted to pornography. Tonight, I'm going to beat it.

My doctor told me to only eat healthy things. So for breakfast, I had a jogger. But he didn't agree with me. Now I've got the runs.

My friend worked for years at the pork and bean factory, but after a rather nasty accident, he got canned.

Lots of magazines are going bankrupt. Origami Weekly just folded, Drowning Monthly just went under, & Blood Quarterly has bad circulation.

There is a fine line between confident and oblivious.

I go to a discount topless bar. Everything is 50% off.

I annoy strippers because I'm notoriously cheap, and they hate where I stuff the nickels.

Glaceau has a product called Smart Water, but only an idiot would pay $2.59 for a bottle of water.

I adopted a highway. It cost me $32000 for its first year of college.

I hid some cash in an old sofa that burned in a fire, so I don't have cash to buy a new sofa. It's a real Couch-22.

I'm starting a website for people who like to take home movies of their potatoes. It's called YouTuber.

The hardest thing about killing zombies is convincing the cops they were already dead when you shot them.

IMO, the only people allowed to protest abortion are those who have adopted 25 children or more.

"Diversity" is just another way of saying "put your wallet in your front pocket."

My buddy told me that cows have four stomachs, but I told him that was a lot of tripe.

I've got an adverb fetish. It makes me really really really really really really really really really really really hot.

My recent doctor visit confirms that you shouldn't use Chapstick you found without a cap on the men's room floor at the bus station.

How do amoebas communicate? Cell phones.

I was all set to go to Scarborough Fair, but I ran out of thyme.

Don't you hate waking up and stepping barefoot on a big pile of dog poo after a night of drinking, then remembering you don't own a dog?

Mr. Milk got picked last for kickball. Because he always got creamed.

Not only was Hitler a maniac who killed millions of people, but he also ruined the "mini-mustache" look for the rest of us.

Did I remember to take my memory medication?

Happy Late Father's Day. (That's for all of you with dead dads.)

I practice safe sex. But my wife accidentally got locked in the safe, and I can't remember the combination.

It's easy to always focus on the negative. That's why I do it, because it's easy.

I was going through my closet and found a "We Shall Never Forget" tee shirt, but I forgot why I bought it.

At the eulogy, the priest said the deceased was now in a much better place. Where? That dark and cramped coffin? How is that better?

Making "best of" lists is silly and stupid, and I've come up with the top twenty-five reasons why.

My best friend died injecting drugs. The coroner removed two joints and a one-hitter from his right ventricle.

When Barbie gets older, will she need plastic surgery?

These are trying times. Today, I'm trying some crystal meth.

I went out to eat and tried a Rocky Mountain Oyster. I had a ball.

When our little League Team went to the World Series in Iowa, we had to ride coach. We hated it, but coach gave us each $5 not to tell.

Grilled some brats. They were the wurst.

We have a crack whore problem in Chicago. There aren't enough to go around.

I sved bigg mnoney on my eeyes aat D.r. Bobbs dicountt Lasiks!!1!

I never pulled the wings off flies or stuck firecrackers in frogs when I was a child. That didn't happen until I was in my twenties.

The universe is expanding, which is incredible, especially in this economy.

Being Goth isn't just about dressing in black, getting a nose ring, and listening to The Cure. It's also about eye make-up, and lots of it.

They should have an award for being modest. I'd win, for sure.

My get rich quick scheme, Gently Used Toilet Paper, isn't doing as well as I'd hoped. Perhaps my Second Hand Floss idea will make up for it.

Erosion, though an essential component to understanding earth's geography, isn't very interesting to watch.

A new drink for the hearing impaired: Liparitas

Instead of "Mothers Day" how about "Sexy Virgins Day?" It can be nine months earlier.

I put a toilet in my Jeep. So, technically, I can now call it a dump truck. Now I never have accidents.

I shoplift at Goodwill stores, but I never steal anything decent and always end up giving it to charity.

Some things really shouldn't be artificially flavored. Like guns, or toilet seats.

Breakfast is the most important meal of the morning.

The Oreo juggler was unemployed, because no one wanted to see him toss his cookies.

We used to call him "Fireworks Freddie", which was much cooler than his new nickname, "Stumpy Fred."

I invented an invisible car, but I forgot where I parked it.

I dated a photographer, but she dwelled on the negative.

And on the seventh day, the Lord rested. So how long must we wait for Him to stop resting and get back to work?

Librarians have big hearts. Probably because they have good circulation.

I wrote a book on snakes, and was bitten eight times. Next time, I'll write the book on paper instead.

Had phone sex with my wife. She charged five dollars a minute.

Using Twitter while driving is dangerous. It's too easy to mispell something.

I wrote a book about my car. It's an autobiography.

I just read a book called The Very Small Box, but I couldn't get into it.

I didn't pay back my student loan, so they just repossessed my education. Now I'm not allowed to use anything I learned from '88-'92.

I returned my buffalo cell phone. Too many roaming charges.

I just changed my name to "Car Repairs" so I could get more hits on Google.

We need to focus our efforts and pass laws to legalize marijua... dude, you got any chips?

I wrote a book called The 144 Murders. It's gross.

I wrote another book called The Paraplegic Murders. It'll keep you glued to the chair. You'll read it in one sitting. But the ending is lame.

Years ago, I wrote a book called The Elephant Murders. It's a trunk novel.

I wrote another book called The Chickadee Murders. Buy it. It's cheep.

I wrote another book called The Elevator Murders. It has its ups and downs.

I wrote another book called The Viagra Murders. It will keep you up all night.

I copyrighted the word "copyright." Now a lot of people owe me some serious money.

I'm writing a book about a man who buys a cemetery, but it isn't a good plot.

My doctor asked if I was sexually active. I said no, I just lie there and my wife does all the work.

Research confirmed my cereal suspicions: "Crunch Berries" aren't real fruit. Shame on you, Cap'n.

"Get the lead out," said Mr. Pencil. I admit, he had a good point.

My neighbor, Mr. Circle, always seems to be a round.

It's hard to cosplay Transformers, because fanboys keep trying to bend your legs the wrong way and shove your head down into your neck.

I'm going to open a chili shop and call it The Gas Station.

Bought an electric socket, at an outlet store.

After years of struggle, I've finally overcome my chronic narcolepssszzzzzzzzzzkkkzzzzzzzzzzzzzzkkkkkkk...

If you took all the snakes in the world, and laid them end to end, it would probably take a lot of time.

I joined a bulimia support group. We all have a light snack, then talk about whatever comes up.

Chunky style peanut butter is great. I wish they made other things chunky style. Like hot dogs.

Every loves the traditional Konrath Family Easter Egg Hunt, except my wife. I think it's because the speculum is cold.

Christ has died. Christ has risen. Zombie! Shoot the head!

I'd eat more vegetables if, instead of vitamins and minerals, they were filled with more essential compounds. Like caffeine and alcohol.

Proposed T-shirt slogan for the busy parent: "I Am Not Google"

If you're reincarnated in Norway, are you bjorn again?

That wasn't a flying squirrel! I saw you throw it!

The nurse dove into the pool and saved my life. She's a wet nurse. But what I really want, is a head nurse.

I like to take amphetamines and tranquilizers at the same time, so I can feel normal.

I didn't know you had to mail back Netflix DVDs. So far "Showgirls" has cost me $687.99.

I'm appalled by all of the pornography on the Internet. In fact, I'm appalled by it roughly seven and a half hours a day.

The answer isn't sex, or drugs, or money. The answer is taking drugs while having sex on a big pile of money.

Just got the Director's Cut of Mary Poppins. Looking forward to the deleted "bad touch" scene & the alternate ending with the waterboarding.

You shouldn't throw out the baby with the bathwater. Unless you really don't like being a parent that much. Or your baby is butt ugly.

I would like sushi more if it were breaded and fried in a square shape, then put on a bun with some American cheese. And served by a clown.

I hate wearing watches, so I trained my dog to tell time and cling to my wrist and bark every sixty seconds. It's so much easier this way.

Birthday wishes are nice. But nobody gave me what I really wanted; a robot stripper filled with gummy bears and cocaine. Maybe next year...

I've found the quickest and cheapest way to deal with a runny nose without medication, is the multi-purpose bendy straw.

Never let them see you sweat. If you start to sweat, poke them right in the eyes, Moe style.

I was stuck in the middle of a riot the other day, and the looting was positively horrible. I only got two flatscreen TVs and a Zune.

I just watched a video about trout fishing. It was a streaming video.

Comedians never die. Their jokes live on posthumorously.

I don't see how DNA can catch criminals. It's too small to drive a car, let alone slap on some handcuffs.

I haven't learned a thing in hypnotism class, and it costs $300 an hour. But for some reason I just signed up for six more sessions.

I've planted over three hundred eggs, but haven't grown a single chicken.

I realized I'm not fat; just too short for my body weight. So instead of going on a diet, I'm committing myself to growing 17 inches taller.

I've talked to dozens of people, but nobody wants to invest in my all natural "green" toilet paper substitute; the washable pooper cactus.

I bet if time stopped, there would be very few people who would spend six grand on a Rolex. Especially since we'd probably all be dead.

I don't fear that aliens are reading my mind. The tin foil hat is just a precaution.

It's been 25 years. Did Frankie ever make it to Hollywood?

My beeper plays Led Zeppelin riffs when I get a call. It's my Jimmy Pager.

I'm now on a vegan diet. So far this month I've eaten two vegans.

I want to be a poseur, but I'm really not sincere or authentic, so I just act like one and hope I'm accepted by other poseurs.

My wife is demanding a romantic getaway this Valentine Day, but she refuses to tell me whom she's going with.

I've been hoping for a comeback, but I think I'm about ready to sell my stocks in VHS, Polaroid, and floppy disks.

If someone cut off my leg, I'd be mad. Hopping mad.

Cherish is the word I use to describe. No, wait... I meant "extort."

I don't see why ketchup is considered a condiment —I think it's a perfectly good meal all on its own. Especially if you let it get gummy.

I never let sleeping dogs lie. Dogs should have to tell the truth.

It's tough being perfect. You have to be careful you don't make even the tiniest little mistaek.

They should make a video game that's a video game simulator, for when you don't want to play a real video game.

I'm all for equality, as long as I'm making more money than everyone else.

Life isn't about what you can take. It's about what you can take and get away with.

It's important not to respond to your critics. They're far too stupid, ugly, lazy, and smelly to understand anyway.

You have to watch out for bad cholesterol. The other day, I was eating a pizza, and some bad cholesterol stole my car.

I went bowling with my son. A ball rolls better.

The waiter thought I was nuts when I asked for A1 sauce. I hate snobs like that. I should be able to pour whatever I want on my apple pie.

I tried to become a male prostitute, but couldn't find any willing partners when I told them I charged by the second.

Life sucks, but doesn't swallow.

Spanking can cause deep psychological scars in children. So you should wait until they're asleep, then blame it on bad dreams.

I pinch pennies so tight Lincoln's face is on my thumb.

It came straight from the horse's mouth. I think it's a tooth.

If you have a gambling problem, please visit www.Bet-It-All-Now.com and win big! All major credit cards accepted.

I'm appalled by how many men objectify a woman's breasts. Maybe you should realize, Mr. One-Track-Mind, she's also got a great butt.

She told me the necklace was too tight and when she finally got it on it made her eyes bug out. I decided not to tell her it was a bracelet.

Someone once touched me in a bad place. Gary, Indiana.

A word to the wise: insisting your profession is "a human sundial" when you get arrested for indecent exposure does not amuse the judge.

It took me three hours to catch that chicken. Talk about fast food.

The Internet has many wonders, but for some reason Amish porn isn't one of them.

She called them "butter cookies" but they were really just whole sticks of butter with sugar sprinkled on top. I ate three.

I saw a cow in a leather jacket and cowboy boots, eating hamburgers, and I asked her why. She had no excuse. Maybe because cows can't talk.

Should old acquaintance be... uh... I can't remember.

I can tolerate veins in a hotdog. But I draw the limit at foreskins. Though, I did give the chef a tip.

He was a snappy dresser, until the day he lost both thumbs.

I hate Quitters Anonymous meetings, but I just keep going for some reason.

I missed mime class, because I was practicing at home and got stuck in an imaginary box.

When there's something really chewy in the apple pie, but you can't really identify it, I really hope it isn't cartilage.

All men are created equal. But then some open their mouths and really test that notion.

Some of my best friends are books, except for The Grapes of Wrath, which slept with my wife and beat me up.

Beer —it's good for what ales you.

Indeed, the pen is mightier than the sword. But only the rocket pen, which fires a surface to air missile filled with tiny swords.

I'm going to get a full body tattoo. It will be a picture of someone thinner and more attractive.

I don't think my psychiatrist understands me. Maybe I should have chosen one that speaks English.

I just bought one of those new morse code cell phones. It's totally .- . — . ... —- — . .. —.

I wrote a book about menopause, but it is hard to understand because it doesn't have any periods.

When the old gypsy cursed me, I laughed in her face. I'm not laughing now, because when she saw me laugh she beat the hell out of me.

I'm fearless, except when it comes to things that really scare me.

Hemorrhoids are awful. I don't know what is worse, the itching, the pain, or the taste.

I don't care if it is another dare, I'll never shave with a rusty bottle cap and witch hazel ever again.

FYI, a screwdriver isn't the proper tool to remove earwax. What was that? You say something?

I like to jog backwards so I can see what I missed.

I'm bi-curious, but I feel I'd only be hurt in the end.

I've got a closed-captioned TV on a ten foot stand. It's the ultimate in hi-def.

I invented the world's smallest cell phone. But I can't seem to find it.

Are hearing aids becoming more expensive? I haven't heard anything about it.

Have you ever had an affair with a woman married to someone else? I have. I hope Grandpa never finds out.

Making fun of the elderly is wrong. Unless they're really really old. Then it's OK, because, hey, what are they going to do about it?

Catching a tiger by the toe gets easier with practice, my friend Stumpy told me.

I was addicted to nicotine gum, chewing three packs a day. So in order to ween myself off, I started smoking.

Grandma said the secret ingredient in her cookies was love. But I spied on her while she was baking. It was really boogers.

I'm hoping for the day humans learn to breathe underwater, but I'm not holding my breath.

I have two left feet. They're in the freezer. I also have a can full of knuckles.

My foot was injured at the mattress factory, and now I've got a spring in my step.

The crytographer called in sick, because caught a code. Yeah, I groaned too when I thought of it.

Twenty-five percent of people surveyed claim to understand percentages. The other eighty percent do not.

I think the candy companies should make a candy that can be not only be eaten, but also snorted. Also, it should have cocaine in it.

One of the "things" that "writers" like to "do" most of "all" is to "abuse" quotation "marks."

Few things are as crucial, decisive, exigent, foremost, imperative, meaningful, necessary, relevant, salient, and vital, as the synonym.

Sex is great exercise, but I probably need more exercise than just four minutes a month.

Next time you're in an 'everything is a dollar' store, ask the cashier how much each item is. They'll think it's funny, so ask often.

Pets enrich our lives, with many essential vitamins and minerals.

People who rate things are overrated.

I'm writing a book about elderly dinosaurs. It's called Geriassic Park. The T-Rex hero breaks a hip, and his children never call.

People do the funniest things when they're on fire.

I had a pair of Velcro underwear, but they got ripped off.

I bet when Hormel Foods sends out emails they get blocked a lot.

It took me 25 years to realize it, but yes, Boy George, I really want to hurt you.

I just found out I'm allergic to myself. Now I can't take me anywhere.

When you're going through ice-cream cone withdrawal, do you get the shakes?

If you take your bike to a smelting plant, is that recycling?

I rewrite all of my stories until I get to the fourth draft. After that, I switch to bottles.

When I saw her, my breath caught and my heart skipped a beat. But I realized later it was really a myocardial infarction.

The best revenge is living a long, fulfilling life. That and burning down their house while they're trapped inside.

I've taken several pilates classes, but they still won't let me fly any airplanes.

I just saw my first Bollywood movie. It had a caste of thousands.

I hate it when I get a hair on my tongue. Especially when the hair is attached to an angry weasel.

Yellow is my favorite yellowish color, though orange is a close second.

Whenever I go fishing, I'm reminded of an old girlfriend. Her name was Annette. She also had a sister, named Smallmouth Bass.

Ah, October. Time to finally throw out that Christmas tree.

It's better to have loved and lost, than to have bet on the ponies and lost.

Some say you should love your enemy. I say, love his wife. That'll really piss him off.

The things that come out of the mouths of babes. Like this toaster. How'd he fit that whole thing in there?

Roget had waaaay too much free time.

Sometimes the truth hurts. Especially when it's followed by a severe beating.

If I had a ten dollars for every car accident I've ever been in, I still couldn't pay my insurance.

I hated him, but he said I couldn't judge him unless I walked a mile in his shoes. So I beat him up and took his shoes.

Senility isn't all bad. Buy one magazine, and it entertains you for the rest of your life.

One thing that has never caught on as a form of group celebration and entertainment, is the enema.

I've written a book about Viagra. It's a pop-up book. It was a hard book to write.

I named my daughter "Virus." Isn't that catchy?

I think the best headache medicine would be when you open the bottle, a monster jumps out and chases you all around the house, trying to kill you. I bet that would really take your mind off of your headache. It would probably work as a laxative, too.

I like to go hunting for deer with one of those toy guns that has a little "BANG" flag pop out when you pull the trigger. Then, when all the deer are laughing at my joke, I shoot them with my 12 guage.

Sex is best with someone you love. That's why I love everyone.

My whole family loves "Pirate Day", especially my ten year old son. We make paper pirate hats and swords out of cardboard, and draw pictures of pirate ships, and then break into people's houses and rape and pillage them.

Fingernail biting is a bad habit, but it's even worse when the fingers aren't your own.

I'm not afraid of genetically altered or irradiated fruit, except for that giant pear who followed me home and ate my children.

It's not really "stealing" if you plan to return everything you stole some day, perhaps after you die.

He said it was CPR, but I was only sleeping. Also, I don't think CPR uses tongue.

This writing business isn't about "publicity." Or "fame." It has nothing to do with the amount of "money" we "earn." As "writers" this "business" is about "one thing" and "one thing only" —-our "ability" to abuse "quotation marks."

It would be cool to be a shark, but not without its specific challenges, like driving to work and breathing air.

When I'm fishing I don't use hooks because I don't want to hurt any fish. Also I stay away from water and boats and the outdoors. So basically I just sit on the sofa and watch TV.

Making "buttered popcorn" using styrofoam packing pellets and motor oil isn't as tasty as it sounds.

I wish I had an angel & devil appear on my shoulders every time I had to make a moral decision, because I could eat those guys when I was hungry.

When you're a professional eater, a lunch break is just more work.

It's always darkest just before the vampires attack.

As I turned my head and coughed I thought, "How lucky I am to have found a doctor who gives free exams in back alleys."

I bought some Dutch cheese, and it was really Gouda.

Today I have spontaneity practice, followed by my Procrastinator's Anonymous meeting, which I'm going to blow off.

I'm stating a new club called "Everyone Is Excluded." I'd invite you, but I'm not invited either.

A child's laughter is more precious than gold. I keep telling the pawn shop guy that, but he still won't buy my son.

I'm reducing my beer consumption to one glass a day. Anyone know where I can find a 200 ounce glass?

I don't feel bad about stealing music online, because I only steal songs that I really hate and will never listen to.

I wrote a book about potty training. It was a number two bestseller.

Time is relative. That's why I call him "Uncle Time."

I'm writing a novel about a dwarf. Does that make it a short story?

With some lube I can fit my whole hand up my nose.

I'm starting to think that Beatles' song Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds may be about some sort of drug use.

Maybe there wouldn't be so many poor people in the world if they all had a bunch of money.

Sleep is overrated. So is Casablanca. They need to remake it with Will Ferrell. That would be funny. Also, add some kung fu.

— — — — — — — — —-

Are you still reading this? Don't you have anything better you could be doing? Like work? Or organize your closet?

Where was I?

Oh yeah, this auction thing.

So I'm selling a bunch of books. And yeah, they're funny. But they're also scary. And a few even have sex in them, though not as much as I'd prefer, which is kind of like my marriage. So back to the books.

The smart thing for me to do would be to cut and paste the book descriptions from Amazon.com, but that sounds a lot like work, and anyone who is really interested in this auction can look up the official descriptions on their own. Google is your friend, folks. And he's a good friend, but not so good that he'll loan you money, even though he's worth over a billion dollars.

Anyway, here's a quickie description of my books.

WHISKEY SOUR - The first book in the Jack Daniels series. Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels is a Chicago cop, and she chases serial killers. All of the books are named after drinks. Isn't that clever? If I keep this up much longer, I'll have to write one called 12 STEP PROGRAM. Anyway, it's a good book. Not my best, but not bad for my first published novel. I'd give it a 7 out of 10. Plus, it has a very nice font. Maybe I'll give it an 8, because the font is so nice.

BLOODY MARY - The second Jack Daniels book. More laughs and scares. 8 out of 10, but I'm being generous because I've been drinking.

RUSTY NAIL - The third Jack Daniels book, and my favorite of the series. It's also the goriest. Lots of people die horribly in this one, but I love the ending. I cry every time I read this book. Not because it's sad. But because they paid me so little money for it. 9 out of 10.

DIRTY MARTINI - The fourth Jack Daniels. After Rusty Nail, my mom asked me to write a book with no blood in it. So I did. This one is about a poisoner. It's still scary, but no gore. Also, there's a bit of hanky panky. I didn't ask Mom if she liked that scene, because I'd need therapy if I found out. 8 out of 10.

FUZZY NAVEL - The fifth Jack Daniels book. The villain from Rusty Nail is back. This one is a lot of fun. It all takes place in an eight hour period. Jack is stuck in the house with a psycho, but she can't leave because she's surrounded by snipers. Why Hollywood hasn't picked this up yet just blows me away. Hello! High concept! Then again, they'd probably cast Bea Arthur as Jack, and make her partner a martian. 9 out of 10, with a cliffhanger ending that pissed off my fans. Both of them.

CHERRY BOMB - The sixth Jack Daniels book. My second fave. This has a four page sex scene in it. When my wife read it, she was really upset. I asked her why, and she said, "Because you've never gone four pages!" Honey, it's fiction. 9 out of 10.

AFRAID - This is a book I wrote under the name Jack Kilborn. No laughs in this one. It's like Stephen King on steroids. Scary stuff. Hollywood did have the sense to option this one, so maybe it will be coming soon to a theater near you. If the movie gets made, I'm buying everyone a beer. 9 out of 10.

THESE GUNS FOR HIRE - This is an anthology of hitman stories I edited. Editing sucks. It's like being an unpaid prostititute. There's no money in it, and the process is tedious. On the plus side, it was cool to work

with all of the famous authors who gave me stories. This list is far too long to reprint here. I think one of them was named Dave. Or something starting with a D. 8 out of 10.

THE LIST - This is one of my books that was never published. You might ask, "If it was never published, what's it doing in this auction?" You sure do ask a lot of question, don't you, Nosey Face? One my website (which you should have already bookmarked by now) I give away some of my early ebooks for free. These were books I wrote prior to Whiskey Sour. This one is a technothriller, and I have a soft spot for it. So do readers. I've sold over 10,000 ebooks on Kindle of The List. Hello, Hollywood? You paying attention? Is anyone even still reading this? 9 out of 10.

ORIGIN - Another one of my early technothrillers. This is about a secret government compound where they're studying Satan. It's a cross between Jurassic Park and The Exorcist, and it's the only book I've every written where I think a toy company could make action figures from the characters. Wouldn't you buy "The Devil with Sheep Killing Action" for little Timmy? I would. 9 out of 10.

DISTURB - My least favorite of all my novels. It's not a bad book, and it is high concept (science invents a pill that replaces a full night of sleep), but I never really warmed up to the main character, who was a little too serious. Also, I think it has too many verbs. 7 out of 10.

SUCKERS - I wrote this is Jeff Strand. It features one of my characters from the Jack Daniels series, a cop named Harry McGlade. It's a limited edition hardcover chapbook, 100 pages long, that sold for $20. Jeff also signed it. It's one of the funniest things I've ever written, and if you don't laugh while reading it, you're probably dead, or Dick Cheney. 9 out of 10.

LIKE A CHINESE TATTOO - This is an anthology of horror stories. I have three stories in here, including a Harry McGlade novella called THE NECRO FILES. It is the most fun I've ever had writing, and is the funniest thing I've ever done. There are more jokes on a single page than there are in most so-called humorous mysteries. Plus, bad language. And pooping. 11 out of 10.

MISSING - Another anthology. This features a Jack Daniels novella called FLOATERS, which I wrote with Henry Perez. Fun story, but I'm only giving it a 5 out of 10 just to piss off Henry. Because that's how I roll.

Is that it? Did I get them all?

Okay, now I'll open the floor to questions.

Q: How does your wife put up with you?

A: I slip Prozac into her morning coffee.

Q: I only want a few of these books. Will you break up the auction?

A: No. But you're free to contact me. I probably have more copies.

Q: If I win, can I get these in time for Chrismas?

A: Yes. And if you live near Chicago, I'll hand-deliver them, and sing a Christmas Carol at your door. Possibly Little Drummer Boy. But it could be Rudolph if I'm feeling frivilous.

Q: You sure wrote a lot.

A: That's not a question. But I'll answer it anyway. I'm a writer. Writers write. It's what we do.

Q: I meant you sure wrote a lot in this auction description. Bored much?

A: Oh. Did I mention this is a charity auction?

Q: The money goes to charity?

A: Absolutely. Every penny I earn on this auction goes to the "Keep Joe in Beer" fund, which ensures I won't spend the holidays sober. If you met my family, you'd understand how essential this is.

Q: I think you're a vulgar, conceited little man, and this auction is in bad taste.

A: Say that again, but take your pants off first.

Q: Are your books this funny?

A: They're funnier. Plus, they mow your lawn for you, and cure H1N1. You really should bid a lot of money. Trust me. I'm a published author.

Q: Aren't you on a deadline right now? Should you be writing instead of screwing around on eBay?

A: Well, gotta go. Happy holidays, everyone! Also, check out my other auction. My son is selling some of his PSP games, and the more money they go for, the bigger his Christmas gift to me will be.

Shelf Space and Paper Trails

Whoever has their name on the most pieces of paper, wins.

This has been true in the print world since the beginning of print. The more copies available, the more exposure people have to those books. The more exposure, the more potential fans.

With authors, having big print runs is always a good thing. Even if a hardcover run doesn't sell that well, the books get remaindered. While authors don't get any royalties on these $3.99 discount titles found in the sales sections of bookstores, these books do find new readers, some of who will go on to buy the author's other, newer work.

If your book stays in print, and it's joined by other books of yours, this improves your chances to be discovered, because now you have shelf space. If your books take up five, ten, or twenty spots on a bookstore (or library) shelf, you're more likely to be noticed by browsers.

But your name on books isn't the only paper that counts.

Your name in reviews leads people to your books. Your name on the blurbs of other writers' books can also have a similar effect. Every short story you write and sell widens your potential fanbase.

Ads. Press releases. Articles. Every piece of paper your name is on can help your career, because it's one more reminder to the world that you exist. It's a paper trail that leads right to you.

But does this apply to virtual paper? How about ebooks and the Internet?

Yes. A thousand times yes.

The Internet is permanent. Every mention of your name and your books will last forever, leading people in your direction. And unlike print, which can take a long time to build up to reach that critical mass/tipping point where you become a household name, the Internet can work much faster.

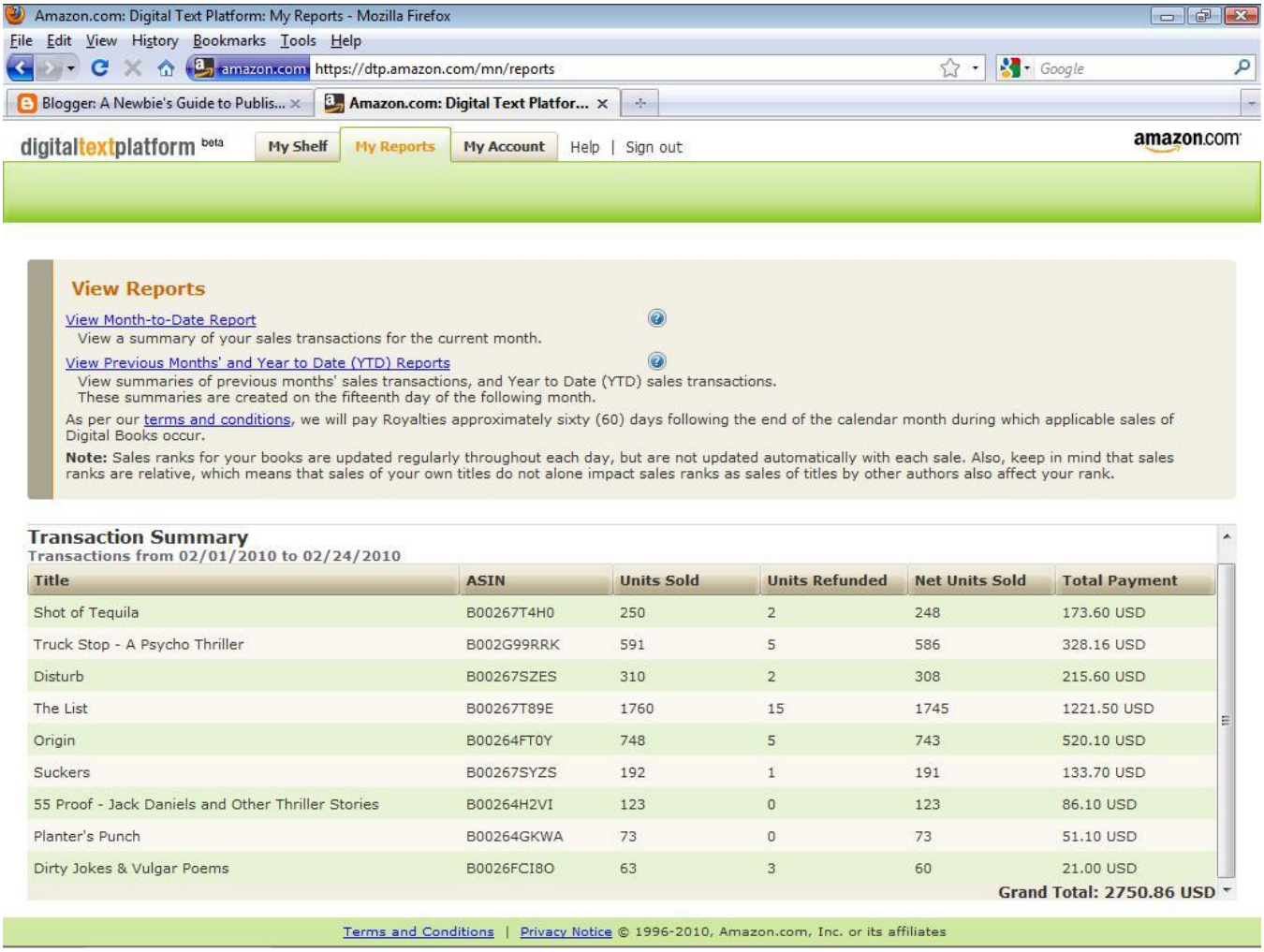
As far as I know, no author has gone "viral" yet. Though some, like Cory Doctorow, Boyd Morrison, and Scott Sigler, have used the Internet wisely to widen their fanbase and turn popularity into money.

This blog gets thousands of hit per week. On weeks I blog about ebooks, my ebook sales go up. When I release a newsletter to 10,000 people, my Amazon numbers spike. If I Twitter something timely, I get more traffic.

Your digital name on digital paper (the world wide web) works twice. First, it works for those who see it when it happens. Next, it works for those who see it weeks, months, or years after it happened.

It can be both instant and cumulative. And it can be very effective.

As of today, Feb 24 at 9:07am, I've made $2750 this month on Kindle.



Title	ASIN	Units Sold	Units Refunded	Net Units Sold	Total Payment
Shot of Tequila	B00267T4H0	250	2	248	173.60 USD
Truck Stop - A Psycho Thriller	B002G99RRK	591	5	586	328.16 USD
Disturb	B00267SZES	310	2	308	215.60 USD
The List	B00267T89E	1760	15	1745	1221.50 USD
Origin	B00264FT0Y	748	5	743	520.10 USD
Suckers	B00267SYZS	192	1	191	133.70 USD
55 Proof - Jack Daniels and Other Thriller Stories	B00264H2VI	123	0	123	86.10 USD
Planter's Punch	B00264GKWA	73	0	73	51.10 USD
Dirty Jokes & Vulgar Poems	B0026FCI8O	63	3	60	21.00 USD

Next month, I'm putting four more ebooks up on Kindle (including an updated version of the Newbie's Guide to Publishing book.)

I'd be a fool not to. More ebooks means more chances to discover me, which means more potential sales.

The more shelf space I have, the more books I'll sell.

Which brings us to the obvious question: What can you do to get your name on more pieces of paper?

1. Look At Your Past - My early novels, which were rejected more than 500 times, have become long-term investments that are finally paying off. I wish I had more rejected novels. If you've got a book that was good enough to land an agent, but didn't sell, there's no reason you shouldn't be getting some of this ebook traffic. Just make sure the work is good.

2. Previously Published Work - Got some out-of-print novels? Some short stories or articles? Turn these into ebooks. Put them on your website for free, and on Kindle for a small fee. The more virtual shelf space you take up, the better.

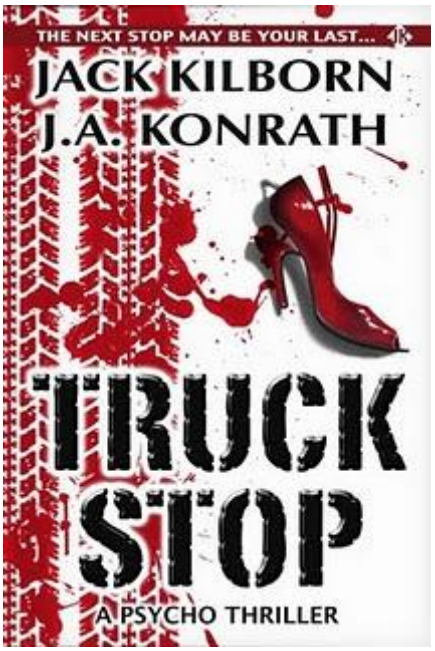
3. Blog, Website, Social Networks - Your Internet presence is the perfect opportunity to find new readers. Surfers are looking for content. If you write a thoughtful blog, have a lot of free stuff on your website, and you're an active participant in online communities, you're getting your name out there, both passively (thanks to search engines) and actively (thanks to links and signatures.)

4. Reviews - Recently, several large NY Print Publishers announced they were discontinuing printed galleys and instead giving ebook advanced readers to booksellers and reviewers. Guess what? I've been doing this for years. I've sent out hundreds of ebooks for free to reviewers and bloggers and booksellers. If you can trade an advance ebook copy for a review, that's a small price to pay.

5. Writing. Writers write. If you're avoiding writing for the ebook market, you should perhaps rethink your priorities.

My third bestselling ebook on Kindle is TRUCK STOP. I wrote TRUCK STOP specifically for Kindle. And I had an insidious reason for doing so.

TRUCK STOP is a Jack Daniels novella, where Jack chases two killers. The first is Donaldson, the villain from SERIAL which I wrote with Blake Crouch under the name Jack Kilborn (and which has been downloaded more than 200,000 times.) The second is Taylor, the villain from AFRAID by Jack Kilborn.



TRUCK STOP is basically a gateway drug. Those who read **SERIAL for free**, or **TRUCK STOP for $1.59**, will often go on to read AFRAID and the entire Jack Daniels series. TRUCK STOP is a fun story, with some thrills and laughs, but its ultimate goal is to lead people to more of my writing. It's currently the #380 bestseller in the Kindle store.

AFRAID is currently #756 in the Kindle store. It came out ten months ago, and is priced at $5.59.

WHISKEY SOUR is currently #3174 in the Kindle store, priced at $4.79. That's not too shabby, considering it came out six years ago.

Why is a six-year-old book selling better than 420,000 other Kindle titles, many by big bestselling name authors?

Because of shelf space and paper trails. Because I've positioned myself there, with low cost Kindle books and timely blog topics. Because I've blurbed a lot of authors, and keep my website updated, and use Twitter

and Facebook. Because I've toured, and been reviewed, and gone to conferences, and generally done all that I can to get my name out there.

I never got big discounting in the bookstores, or coop. I never got huge marketing campaigns. I never got big print runs, or my books in Sam's Club and CVS.

Yet I'm still standing. And I can't help but think it has something to do with my efforts to get my name on as many pieces of paper —both dead tree and virtual —as I possibly can.

Quality counts. But quantity is important too.

It would be wonderful if every new book got a huge print run and a major advertising campaign and a giant marketing push. I'm still waiting for that to happen to me.

But while I continue to wait, I'm doing everything I can to make my own luck. And as the tide shifts from DTBs to ebooks, more and more authors are going to make their own luck, too.

Do you want to be one of them?

30 comments

How To Give A Great Talk

by Barry Eisler

1. Why a Talk?

Let's say you've been asked to give a talk. It's worth considering, why a talk? Why not write an essay, instead, or delivery the idea as a speech?

All forms of delivery have certain inherent strengths and weaknesses. You want to be aware of these so you can choose the form that's best for your content and tune the content to take advantage of the form.

The primary distinguishing benefit of a talk, which we might think of as the competitive advantage of a talk, is the possibility of an immediate, shared, emotional connection with the audience. So if you want to move the audience to take action not just because of what you said, but also because you're the one who said it, a talk is likely the way to go. If mostly what you want is to inform, an essay is probably better. If mostly what you want is to persuade, consider a speech.

What are some other differences? A talk tends to be more open-ended than a speech. A talk has a broader range of possibilities; a speech is more limited, possibly even binary ("You should vote for Candidate X, You should vote for Candidate Y"). A talk feels more like sharing; a speech feels more like argument. A talk feels more like exploration; a speech feels more like overt persuasion. A talk tends to feel casual, informal, spontaneous; a speech, formal, rehearsed. A talk feels more like you're talking with the audience; a speech feels like you're talking to it.

How about an essay? Lacking the immediacy and physical presence that enable talks to create an emotional bond between the speaker and the audience, an essay needs to use other tools to persuade - primarily, additional data and argument. And essays lend themselves well to additional data and argument: in an essay, readers can absorb things at their own pace, reread, jump around, pause to consider, etc. None of this is feasible during a live performance, so a talk should be a more streamlined format than an essay; an essay, more data-heavy than a talk. Many people don't understand this difference, and think their talk should mean either reading an essay aloud or doing the equivalent using text-heavy PowerPoint slides, which is a common way of creating the bizarre outcome of the audience simultaneously reading an essay on screen while you read it aloud. This approach is rightly known as "Death by PowerPoint," and we'll return to it shortly.

Ask yourself: why am I communicating these ideas in a talk in front of an audience, rather than in a speech or an essay? There should be something in the nature of your talk that makes the subject particularly amenable to be delivered as a talk. And you should hone the presentation of your material to take advantage of the strengths of a talk as a form. Otherwise, how can you justify asking hundreds of people to take the time to show up and listen to you?

(Parenthetical thought: this question is also worth asking of novels and screenplays. That is: why are you using a novel to tell your story? Why not a screenplay (or a stage play, or graphic novel, etc)? Or vice versa.

The different forms have different tendencies, and if you don't have a good reason for favoring the one you're using for this particular story, your delivery will probably be not as strong as it could be.)

2. Content

Reverse Engineer It

When choosing the content of your talk, you have to ask, what does the audience want out of this? What do they expect? Why are these people taking time out of their busy day to listen to me? A related — but not identical question — is, what do *I* want the audience to get out of this?

Nothing is more important to the content of your talk than reverse engineering it by starting with what the audience is there for. I once gave a talk at a seminar on entrepreneurship (and here's the essay I wrote based on that talk. A lot of the information is the same, but the presentation is different — because one was a talk, the other is an essay). One of the speakers gave a death-by-PowerPoint presentation that would have been crushingly boring even if it had been delivered to the audience for whom it was designed: investors. That's right, this guy gave so little thought to what his current audience was there for (to learn lessons about entrepreneurship) that he just ran through the same slides about his startup that he used to try to extract money from investors. It was a complete waste of time, disrespectful to the audience, and made the presenter look like a fool.

(Parenthetical thought: is this not true for everything? All your means should be reverse engineered from your ends. How can you choose a tool if you don't know what you're trying to use it for? How can you choose an appropriate vehicle if you don't know your destination?)

Your Talk is a Story

Think of your talk as a story. That's how I approach a talk, both the creation and the delivery, and it always seems to work. I think people naturally respond to stories (I certainly want to think it, anyway, making a living by writing novels, as I do), and it makes sense to deliver your talk in a form to which people are naturally receptive. Even when I taught technology licensing at Santa Clara Law School back in my lawyering days, I taught my students that a contract is a kind of story — the story of a relationship that hasn't happened yet. (A litigation brief, by the way, can be thought of as the story of a relationship that has happened, and hasn't ended well). People love stories! Why not tell them one?

Teasing Out the Ideas

If I'm having trouble designing the talk, I do a few things. First, I drink coffee. Kidding. Well, sort of. No, first, I need to move. I think better when I'm moving, so I like to get outside and take a walk, someplace quiet, without too many people, without distractions, just landscape slowly rolling past. And I talk to myself — really talk to myself, as though I'm two people.

"So, Barry, what's this talk about?"

"Well, it's about X."

"You think the audience will care about that? Why would they?"

"Well, because..."

"Okay, so what's your main point?"

Etc.

Sometimes the best way to design a talk is to forget it's a "talk." Just start rambling, answering imaginary questions, having an imaginary conversation, expressing whatever comes to mind. I carry a dictaphone to capture the good stuff so I can write it up later.

That last point is worth emphasizing. It's been my experience that the most unexpected, inspired ideas are also the most fleeting. My theory is that when your unconscious is serving up the good stuff, you're in a dream-like state. And, just like when you wake from a dream, what your unconscious serves up can't be held long by your conscious mind. Unless, that is, you write it down. So don't assume you'll remember those inspired ideas later — if you're like me, you won't, unless you use notes or a dictaphone. Don't let those wonderful gifts from your unconscious slip away! It's too much of a loss, and who knows, if you ignore the bounty your unconscious presents you, maybe after a while your unconscious will decide not to bother. Treat those ideas like the precious gifts they are: save them, and use them.

3. Preparation

The Secret of "Memorizing" Your Talk

I know a lot of people are intimidated by the idea of not using notes because they feel like they won't be able to remember their material otherwise. But the thing is, you don't want to remember your material. Or rather, you don't want it memorized (and notes are just a form of external memorization). Memorization inhibits spontaneous delivery. A memorized talk is probably a speech. Nothing wrong with a speech; it's just not a talk.

No, you don't need to remember the whole talk; you just need to remember the skeleton. And this is where not using notes offers multiple benefits. While I'm preparing, I try to extract the main takeaways — that is, the most important points of my talk, the points I most want the audience to remember. Those points will form the talk's skeleton. By not using notes, you force yourself to understand your takeaways very clearly. The reason you have to be so clear on them is that if you don't know what they are, your talk will have no structure, and you'll have a hard time remembering it when you do it live.

So not using notes first enables you — forces you, really — to clarify the structure of your talk. And then that clarified structure enables you to give the talk without notes. You don't need (or, again, want) to remember every single thing; just the main bullet points, so to speak, each of which will cue you about a supporting point. More on this below.

Even people with good memories aren't so good without structure. In fact, I have a feeling what makes for a good memory is an understanding, intuitive or otherwise, of the importance of structure. I read somewhere once that a grandmaster chess player can play 50 boards simultaneously from memory. Incredible, right? But if you arrange the pieces on a board at random, without regard to the rules — that is, without structure — the grandmaster's recollection of the placement of pieces is only slightly better than that of a non-player. In this sense, notes can actually be dangerous, because your reliance on them can enable you to avoid the hard but critical work of ruthlessly clarifying your talk's structure.

Another benefit of knowing your structure, by the way, is that structure helps you manage your time on the fly. If you have three main points you want to make and 12 minutes in which to make them, you know at four minutes (assuming the sections are more or less equal) that you need to move on to point #2.

At my recent TEDx talk, for example, there were three points I wanted to make:

First was that ideas come when we indulge our passions. If there's something you wish you had more time to do everyday, find a way to do it! And ideas will come.

Second, which was folded into the first because I only had 12 minutes, was that you nurture those ideas by asking who, what, where, when, why, and how.

Third was that inspiration is just the beginning; you also need perspiration. How can you find the discipline to work at your idea until it's something real? By listening to messages from your future self. Every time you're faced with a decision about what to do today, imagine how you (your future self) will feel about the decision tomorrow. This is a kind of time travel. We can receive messages from the future through the power of our imaginations — how cool is that?

Summary: indulge your passions and ideas will come; nurture the ideas with the six key questions; always ask, "How will I feel about this when I look back?" to give yourself the discipline to develop your idea into concrete things.

For each of the three points, I had lots of supporting thoughts and anecdotes (for Point #1, for example, everything I was doing (martial arts, CIA, politics, Tokyo, etc.) that led to the birth of John Rain). All of which came easily and naturally during the talk because: (i) they fit logically into the structure; and (ii) I had practiced them.

(Speaking of my TEDx talk, it was taped, so when the video is up, I'll send around the URL).

You Can't Be Natural if You Don't Practice

So you've memorized the top bullet points and know your structure cold. Now you want those bullet points to naturally trigger supporting points. The way to achieve this is through practice.

Go through your talk again and again. Out loud. Start with notes if you need them, but wean yourself as quickly as you can. Get to the point where you're doing the talk as nearly as possible to the way you'll be

doing it for real. Ideally, you'll even get to do a dress rehearsal, so to speak in the actual room. Stand where you'll be standing when you give the talk for real, look out at where the audience will be, do your talk from there. Try to imagine what it'll feel like to give the talk for real, and then try to make yourself feel that way while you're practicing. This is a form of adrenal stress scenario training — the same way Federal Air Marshals and special ops solders prepare for combat. It works.

(Parenthetical thought: in one of my books, John Rain observes that "gearing up calms you down." In other words, when you've trained for an event and then experienced the event, you start to develop confidence in the training. After that, just doing the things you do to prepare, like you do every time, is wonderfully relaxing, calming, and confidence-instilling. "I've done this stuff before. It worked before. It'll work this time. This is great.")

Don't try to practice your talk the same way every time. Again, the goal isn't rote memorization; it's familiarity with structure and underlying points sufficient to enable you to talk naturally. Know in advance that when you do a talk without notes, you will almost certainly forget one or even several of your underlying points. This is fine. It's a very small price to pay for a natural delivery. I don't think I've ever given a talk without realizing after that I'd forgotten one or more of my underlying points. So what? You hit the main points and supported them well enough. If you're obsessed with ruthlessly hitting every single supporting argument, write an essay. When you're giving a talk, the connection with the audience is far more important than an exhaustive examination of the data.

Attitude!

Attitude is important, too. Giving a talk is an opportunity! You have an idea worth spreading (hat-tip, TED), right? Aren't you completely pumped up about the subject of your talk, aren't you just busting to share it? That's how I always feel. A sale is a kind of enthusiasm infection, and your talk is in a sense a sale, no? As a medium of expression, a talk is ideally suited for infecting people with your enthusiasm. Just thinking about how enthusiastic the audience is going to be makes me more enthusiastic!

4. Delivery

Okay, you've figured out the content, you've practiced and prepared, and now it's show time! What do you need to do?

Warming Up The Audience

Probably the most powerful trick I've learned about giving a great talk is meeting the audience beforehand. I learned this one from a guy named Roger Dawson, who wrote one of the best books I've ever read: "You Can Get Anything You Want in Life, But You Have To Do More Than Ask." Dawson is a master negotiator and phenomenal motivational speaker — read the book and listen to his tape series, "Secrets of Power Negotiating." Amazing, amazing guy.

I don't like to step on stage cold. All audiences have to be warmed up a little, and it's suboptimal to have to spend the first few minutes of your talk trying to accomplish that baseline goal. This is why the main

comedy act is always preceded by a warmup. By the time the main act takes the stage, the audience is already in a laughing mood. Likewise for concerts. Plays are preceded by music, movies by previews and credits, books with epigraphs... for all audiences, you have to start by "shaping the battlefield" to some extent, and for a talk, chatting with individuals is a great way to do it. You get to shake hands, look people in the eye, learn a little about who they are and why they're there. By the time you start your actual talk, everyone you've met is excited and on your side. They're less afraid of making eye contact, they're smiling at you from the audience, they want you to succeed. And you in turn feel less like you're talking to a room full of strangers and more like you're just chatting with a room full of friends. A positive cycle results, with your good mood and good will infecting the audience, the audience feeding that back to you, etc., etc.

I always try to spend at least a few minutes before a book signing mingling and chatting with the audience. I never let the bookstore hide me in back until they're ready to formally unveil me. That kind of set-up is like a ditch you have to start by digging out of. Once, I got to a signing early and spent about ten minutes chatting with as many people in the audience as I could. There were over a hundred people there, and by the time I was ready to go, the mood in the room was electric — I was so psyched to talk to these people, and they were so psyched to hear! Then the store representative used the occasion of her introduction to indulge in a long, tangential exegesis on upcoming talks, the role of indie booksellers, her own connection to bookselling... It went on for about 15 minutes, and by the time she was done, all the energy the audience and I had going had been extinguished, and I had to spend the first five or ten minutes of my talk reestablishing it. I learned from that to do my own introductions. After all, if you've already met the audience on your own, is there really any need for someone else to now formally "introduce" you, anyway?

(Parenthetical thought: only amateur negotiators believe the negotiations begin only once everyone sits down at the conference room table. In fact, the most important negotiating has happened in all the communications that preceded the formal sit-down. Similarly, most of the success or failure of your talk will be determined by what you do beforehand — not just the formal preparation, but the way you warm up the audience).

Eye Contact

Eye contact is fundamental to the success of your talk. Without eye contact, it's almost impossible to create that immediate, electric connection with the audience which is the primary advantage of the talk as a form. And even if you can get that connection going in spite of the lack of eye contact, it'll never be remotely as strong as it would have been in the presence of eye contact (we can talk on the phone without eye contact, but even the best phone conversation isn't as good as the face-to-face variety). So you want to make one-on-one eye contact with as many audience members as possible.

The importance of eye contact tells you something about notes, doesn't it? If you're reading, you can't make eye contact, or at least you can't make as much. Have you ever talked to someone who wouldn't look you in the eye? Not a great conversation, was it? And if he needed notes to talk to you, what would you make of that? Ever see a comedian using notes? Of course not! It would be impossible to make people laugh while reading notes. Notes are artificial, and artifice inhibits the transmission of emotion. Don't make the mistake of thinking your talk is primarily logical and rational: if it is, you should probably recraft it and deliver it as

an essay. A talk is also an opportunity to engage people's emotions, and notes make doing so much more difficult.

If They Can't See You, They Can't Feel You

Once you understand that talks are not just about the words coming out of your mouth, but about various levels of physical interaction, too, a few other important items become clear. Never do your talk from behind a lectern or any other barrier. Don't let anything get between you and the audience — if it does, it will impede the connection without which your talk will be a failure. The audience should be able to see you head to toe.

Depending on the room and the size of the audience, I sometimes step down off the stage to make sure the audience and I are literally on the same level. Even a stage can create a feeling of separation. And don't give your talk in the dark! It's much harder for the audience to feel a connection with a disembodied voice. They need to see you as well as hear you, so they can be moved not just by your words and tone of voice, but also by your expressions and body language, by the way you move on the stage.

It should be clear at this point why so many talks are lame. To do a good talk, you have to prepare a lot, and you have to be willing to show more of yourself. The first requires work; the second, risk. But if you think about it, the real work, the real risk, is doing a lame talk and then suffering with it after, knowing you could have, *should* have, done better, and wishing you could have another chance. Well, you can't get that second chance, so do the easy thing: get it right the first time!

No Notes! Or At Least As Few As Possible

Back to notes. I know what you're thinking: Can't you just glance down at your notes from time to time? Well, if you have to, yes. But for the reasons above (and below), breaking contact with the audience to steal glances at your notes is not ideal. Also, remember that your talk is also a performance. Doing a talk with no notes is impressive in its own right! And it shows you've worked hard to prepare. The audience will understand this, and feel respected as a result. If people in the audience feel you respect them, they will respect you in turn. Your talk will go much better as a result. Finally, part of what an audience finds persuasive is their evaluation of your expertise on your subject. Someone who can discuss a subject without notes comes off as more of an expert on that subject than does someone who needs notes. It's hard to move an audience if the audience senses on some level that you haven't mastered your brief.

The Room

I've mentioned lighting. The other physical attributes of the room are also important. Is it too hot or too cold? Too cold is better, if you have to choose — too hot makes people either fidgety or sleepy. Is the room too big? I always urge people to come sit up front so that the crowd, whatever size, has a certain density. The ideal is a full room, but even a half empty room can work fine if the people there are densely clustered up front. For whatever reason, the audience isn't just responding emotionally to you; they're also responding emotionally to cues they give each other, and if they're dispersed, those cues tend to propagate more slowly

or to die out altogether. Especially don't let a pocket of seats stay empty right in front of you. Those empty seats create a kind of vacuum between you and the audience, and will be in full view of everyone who's listening, making the room feel empty to them as well as to you. Always invite people to come up front — if you tease and cajole them, they will respond, and the confidence you show in managing the room has a profoundly positive effect on the audience. I once read about a cop who was in the habit of slipping in a rubber teeth guard before breaking up a bar fight. What do you think was the effect of this behavior on anyone who was thinking about getting rowdy? That's right, seeing the cop's relaxed confidence, and recognizing the experience that lay behind it, had a wonderfully calming effect on anyone who was being unruly.

What about the sound — can everyone hear you? I love to talk without a mic because there's something more immediate about a natural, unamplified voice, but depending on the size of the crowd, on the acoustics of the room, and on your ability to project, un-amplified is often impossible. A little lesson I've learned: if you have reason to doubt, don't just ask, "Can you hear me?" Ask, "Would it better a little louder? A little softer?" People who would otherwise be shy about asking to have the volume turned up will be less shy in response to a leading question.

5. Slides?

Now, a few thoughts about PowerPoint. Because I'm a writer and I'm used to relying only on words to express myself, it's natural for me to give talks without external props like slides. But that's just me. There's no right or wrong answer about whether to use slides; it just depends on what you're trying to accomplish and how you're trying to accomplish it.

Sadly, many people think PowerPoint is necessary for a successful talk. If you are one of them, you have been assimilated by the Borg. People have been giving successful talks since long before PowerPoint began ruining them. For example, here's a hilarious example of The Gettysburg Address done with PowerPoint.

The reason so many people use slides to give talks is because everyone else seems to be doing the same, and people are afraid if they do something different, they might look stupid (fear of looking stupid is one of the most powerful human motivations, but that's a subject for a separate essay). Slides are rarely the result of thought, and so they're rarely used thoughtfully.

(Parenthetical thought: fear of looking stupid also explains the growth of atrocious legalese. Sure, it's opaque, confusing, and hideous, but the partner writes that way, and if I do something different — no matter how sensible — I might look stupid. Here's more on legalese and how to combat it)

It's sobering to consider that slides are used poorly about 95% of the time (I made that statistic up, but it's based on extensive experience). So if you're using slides, statistically speaking it's 95% likely you're using them poorly.

The truth is, PowerPoint is like firearms: an otherwise useful tool that becomes unacceptably dangerous when unleashed in the arms of the untrained masses. PowerPoint should function as a supplement to the

speaker's talk (after all, the reason people have shown up is to hear the talk, right?); instead, it's typically used as the presentation itself. Don't believe me? How many times have you heard someone say, "Just send me your slides?" If the slides work as a standalone, they're not being used as a supplement. And if they work as a standalone, what's the point of showing up to hear the speaker read them? I could have read them myself, without all the travel and hotels.

So what's wrong with the standalone approach? Nothing, I guess, if you enjoy watching someone read from his notes while you read along with him. Not a bad approach when it comes to close-captioned programming for the hearing impaired, but what about for an audience that has no hearing disability? Displaying and then reading one's notes this way is like putting on your makeup in front of 300 people. What people know about makeup, they forget about PowerPoint: the audience wants to see the product, not the process.

Television sometimes gets used this way — some people just need to have a TV going in the room even when they have guests over, maybe because they don't think their conversation alone will be sufficiently interesting. But do you want to be one of those people? And if your conversation is so uninteresting it needs assistance from the equivalent of a television in the background, should you be subjecting a whole roomful of people to it?

So don't be one of the thoughtless ones, the fearful ones. Ask yourself whether you need slides to accompany your talk, and if so, why. What do the slides add? If the answer is, "Nothing positive," scrap them. If they do add something positive, could you make them even better?

If you think you need slides and want to learn to use them powerfully and effectively, for God's sake do yourself and your audience a favor and read Presentation Zen, by Garr Reynolds. Drawing on his own extensive experience presenting to Fortune 500 companies, his years in Japan, and the teachings of various other presentation masters like Seth Godin, Steve Jobs, and Guy Kawasaki, Garr guides you through everything you need to know about the preparation, design, and delivery of awesome presentations, most especially ones that involves slides.

Okay, I'm done talking. Now it's your turn!

Touring

Booklaunch Party June 18

BLOODY MARY is now available, along with the paperback version of WHISKEY SOUR, and I'm celebrating by buying beer and eats for family, friends, and fans.

It's happening from 11:30am-2:00pm, at Damon's Grill on 1140 East Higgins Road, Schaumburg, IL 60173 Phone: 847-995-0064.

Many authors worry about their booklaunch, or have unrealistic expectations, or don't know what to expect. Here's my take on what makes a successful launch party:

1. Food and liquor. This means the party can't be held in a bookstore, which is OK —-a bookstore wouldn't comfortably hold 200 people anyway. Can you have a booklaunch without alcohol? Sure... but don't expect as big a turnout.

2. Books. Well, duh, no brainer there. But you don't want to get the books from your publisher and sell them, because those don't count toward your sales numbers and royalty figures. I suggest getting a bookstore to come to your event and handle the sales. That should be easy —it's basically free money. Who wouldn't want free money?

3. Publicity. You could contact local radio and newspapers, but that would mean feeding people you don't know, which could cost a fortune. I stick to a newsletter announcement, a website announcement, some messages on newsgroups, and some flyers to pass out a few days before the event.

4. Working the room. Once the party starts, make sure you circulate. Sitting in a corner, signing books, is anti-social. Your booklaunch party is for your biggest fans, and you need to be lively and fun and gracious and appreciative and schmoozing like crazy.

5. Location. I usually begin at a restaurant and do most of the signing and selling there, then take people back to my house for more beer and food. Restaurants will usually cut you a good deal because you're bringing in a lot of people, and a book signing is good publicity. Stick to appetizers and finger food.

A friend just had his launch party at a house, and had it catered. That also worked well (though parking was tough to find.) He also had a pianist there, which made me extremely jealous —-I have pianist envy.

6. Sponsorship. I didn't even consider this for my first booklaunch, but for this one it fell into my lap. Goose Island, which is a local brewery, is helping to publicize the event and they're giving me a deal on the beer. Their flyers say "Enjoy Chicago's beer with a Chicago author." Pretty cool. Next year, I'll see if maybe I can get the Mrs. Paul's Fishstix folks involved. Mmmmm... processed and pre-formed fried scrod.

7. Merchandise. A party costs big bucks, and the bookseller is making all the $$$. I like to take some of the sting out of this by selling other stuff, like magazines and anthologies I've appeared in, and T-shirts.

Last year I sold T-shirts. I printed the iron-on transfers on my computer (of my book cover), bought some white Hanes for cheap, and sold them for $6 each. I had 30 of them, and sold out in five minutes. People

paid me to be walking advertisements of my products. How cool is that? Bring a marker to sign the T-shirts.

When you appear in a magazine or an anthology, you can buy contributor's copies at a discount. I've been in a bunch, and these always sell well at a booklaunch.

My bookseller is happy to do the selling of this stuff for me, even though she doesn't get a cut of it —-it's a mutually beneficial relationship.

8. Have fun. This will probably be your best-attended event of the year. All the people who knew you before you became an author will be there, heaping on the praise, buying multiple copies to give away as holiday gifts. Everyone will want a picture. You're the king for a day.

Enjoy it... the rest of your scheduled yearly events won't be as big, as smooth, or as satisfying. In fact, many of the events ahead of you will be poorly attended, stressful, nerve-wracking, and depressing. But don't dwell on that now —-today is your day.

Savor every second.

1 comments

BEA!

I just returned from Book Expo America in NYC, and it went well.

BEA is the publishing industry's trade show, and there are hundreds of booths, and thousands of people who attend.

Do you need to go to BEA? In my opinion, yes. Here's a quick rundown of what I did and why I did it:

Caught the red-eye to NY June 2, and went from the airport to the Park South Hotel, where I was toastmaster for the Backspace Conference (www.bksp.org).

The conference went well. Good attendance, and some big names.

Note to everyone who ever speaks in public: the secret to success is threefold.

1. Be entertaining.
2. Be brief.
3. Keep things moving.

It's very important to keep one eye on your audience to gauge their reactions. I'm surprised how many folks in this biz don't do that. You want to dazzle, and enlighten, and motivate. If there's a mass exodus to the washroom during your talk, or you're hearing snores, wrap it up.

I've done a few dozen conventions, and you can actually lose sales by being boring. Don't be boring.

The conference lasted from noon until eight, and then the after-conference drinking began.

If you're an author, you need a liver made of steel, and kidneys the size of watermelons. Also, have your general practitioner sew on a second bladder. Preferably not where it can be seen.

Schmoozing is essential in this biz. Talking with other authors to get advice and wisdom, learning the industry gossip, and being generous with buying rounds will help you make friends, and you need as many as you can get.

I'm pretty good at schmoozing, and got to my hotel room by 3AM. Note to all: DO NOT stay at the Hotel Pennsylvania. It's a Soviet Gulag. The room was the size of an appliance box, and had paint flaking off the walls, suspicious stains on the carpeting, no batteries in the remote control, crummy pillows, a funny smell, and a bathroom straight out of Midnight Express. The towel bar had been ripped from the wall, leaving two large holes. Why had someone ripped off the towel bar? Possibly to beat themselves over the head with it because they were paying $150 a night for the room. I tried to place a wake-up call for 7AM, and the phone rang over eighty times before the operator picked up.

Since I didn't trust that I'd get the call, I phoned home and woke up my wife, asking her to call me. I would have set the alarm, but my room didn't have a clock.

At 7AM, I did get the wake-up call. I swallowed some Advil, hopped in the shower, and walked the fifteen blocks to the Javits Center because the rumors were true —you can't get a cab in Manhattan.

The sheer size of BEA is overwhelming. There are rows and rows and rows of publishers, all giving out free books, book bags, CDs, DVDs, magazines, catalogs, etc. I went to the Hyperion booth (www.hyperionbooks.com) to find my escort to the Book Sense Luncheon.

Book Sense is the brainchild of the American Booksellers Associate (www.bookweb.org), a group of 1200 independent bookstores who have joined together to help promote themselves and authors they enjoy. I was a Book Sense pick in 2004 for WHISKEY SOUR, so I got an invite.

The banquet went well. I got to meet many indie booksellers, shake some hands, give away some copies of BLOODY MARY, and meet some cool authors.

After the luncheon, I met with my agent, Jane Dystel (www.dystel.com) whom I adore. I then visited the Brilliance Audio (www.brillianceaudio.com) booth, where I found out my book made the cover of their Summer catalog. I also visited Hyperion again, where they had huge stacks of BLOODY MARY to give away, and got caught up in signing a few dozen copies for those who asked.

Hyperion had also made some business cards for me, which looked much better than the ones I printed up on my computer. I actually feel like a pro now, when I hand out a card. I should have gotten some made earlier.

At 6PM, I left BEA and took a shuttle back to the prison camp to change clothes, and I discovered that my room hadn't been cleaned. I called housekeeping, but after 60 rings gave up.

Then I walked to the Horror Writers Association (www.horror.org) NYC chapter meeting at a nearby bar. There was schmoozing, and alcohol was consumed. I managed to get back to the hotel by 4AM, and with great effort managed to place a wake-up call for 7AM.

Saturday was busy. I met my editor for brunch, and she's a joy to be around. We spent about two hours together, then went back to the Javits Center for my first official BEA signing.

Official signings take place at the author area, at the back of the building. There are 30 lanes, each roped off into isles and about thirty yards long. Most authors get a half hour to sign books. Bestsellers get an hour.

My signing was from 1pm-1:30pm. I got there at 12:40, and son of a gun, I already had a line. I spoke to the folks, took a few pictures, then went to my table and began to autograph.

I signed for 70 minutes, because the line never ended. It was an absolute joy. They had to bump the guy who was supposed to follow me.

After the signing, I hit the floor again. I met with Uglytown (www.uglytown.com), who is publishing an anthology I edited (THESE GUNS FOR HIRE, a collection of hitman stories, for 2006). I also met with Andrew Gulli, editor of The Strand Magazine (www.strandmag.com), who is publishing a story of mine, and Kristin Godsey of Writer's Digest, who is publishing an upcoming article of mine.

By 6PM, it was time to get to the ITW Cocktail Party (www.internationalthrillerwriters.com), where I got to schmooze with some major big shots in the business.

Party ended at 8PM. Then, to the bar.

I made it back to the Gulag by 1AM, so exhausted I fell asleep in my suit.

Early flight back to Chicago, where I got home at 3PM and slept for six hours.

Was the trip worthwhile? Absolutely. Besides seeing my agents and editors, I had a chance to see and be seen by many terrific authors, booksellers, librarians, and fans. Among the folks I had a chance to talk to were Lee Child, David Morrell, Gayle Lynds, M.J. Rose, Candace Bushnell, Michael Connelly, Tess Gerritson, Sandra Brown, Barry Eisler, Harry Hunsicker, Richard Curtis, David Hale Smith, David Dun, James Rollins, Elizabeth Becka, Sarah Weinman, Nathan Walpow, Mark Conrad, Leslie Wells, Jane Dystel, Miriam Goderich, Michael Bourret, Steve Alten, Adam Pepper, Monica O'Rourke, Tom Fassbender, Jim Pascoe, Reed Coleman, F. Paul Wilson, Douglas Preston, Christopher Rice, Steve Berry, Jack Ketchum, Jeff Strand, Jeffrey Anderson, Ty Drago, Robert Liparulo, and so many others.

Plus, I confirmed some suspicions I'd always had about publishing.

Agents get dozens of submissions a day. They request full manuscripts on five percent of those, and choose to represent about 3 perscent of those. I'm no math wizard, but I think that means for every 2000 folks who submit, they'll take on three.

On the editorial end, they reject nine out of ten agented submissions. And of those that the editors like, more than half get turned down at the ax meeting (acquisitions).

So, by my very rough estimation, one out of 13320 books gets represented and published.

Of course, one publisher might accept what another rejects. Ditto agents. But we're still talking long odds here.

Which is why, once you do get published, you need to make sure you stay published. BEA is one way to do so.

But next time I'm in NY, I'm staying at the Algonquin.

5 comments

A Weekend in the Life

FRIDAY

6:00AM - Wake up.

6:05-8:30 - Answer email (I get anywhere from 10 to 30 a day that need replies.)

8:30-12:00 - Write. Mailman comes, gives me a rejection. Find a new market and send it right back out.

12:00-4:00 - Work on handouts for Dark and Stormy Conference tomorrow. I'm teaching two classes, each an hour long.

4:00-5:00 - Write Blog.

5:00-12:00 - Continue printing out handouts, and flyers, while updating website.

SATURDAY

6:00AM - Wake up.

7:45 - Get to Dark and stormy conference.

8:00 - Meet bookseller. Schmooze. Notice they didn't bring enough copies of my books, and provide them with some copies at a 40% discount.

8:15-9:45 - Meet and greet writers, old friends, and new fans. Pass out business cards. Put flyers and cards on goody table. Introduce myself to strangers.

10:00-11:00 - Teach first class. Crowd of twenty. The class is about writing and selling short stories. I curtail the humor in favor of actual teaching, though there is still some humor. The class seems to get a lot out of it.

11:00-12:00 - Teach second class. Most of the first class also appears in the second one, which I consider a good sign. Thirty people this time. I keep my energy level high and stay animated, enthusiastic, and interesting. After class, I ask about 15 people how I did, asking for criticism rather than praise (can't learn from praise.) The only crit I get is for letting a student drone on too long when asking a question —-I should have cut her off. I'll know better for next time.

12:00-1:30 - Lunch. Sit with strangers, work the table.

1:30-3:30 - Have a beer with William Kent Krueger, whom I haven't seen in a while. We're joined by Jon and Ruth Jordan (Crimespree magazine), Charlaine Harris, Libby Fischer Hellmann, and Laura Lippman.

3:30 -4:00 - Check with the bookseller. They're out of books. I bring them more. I'm stopped by a group and sign some copies. The woman running the conference (Jeanne Damms) tells me that the audio tapes of my two classes are selling like crazy.

4:00-5:00 - Attend last panel of the day. Sign more books.

5:00-6:00 - After conference cocktail party. Four people buy me beer, and I mingle with an armful of Heinikens. Several folks are going to Shaw's, a fine dining crab house, for dinner, and I snag an invitiation.

6:00-9:30 - It's like deja vu going to Shaw's; I used to be a waiter there four years ago. I see a few people I used to work with, tell them I'm a full-time writer now, invite them to my booklaunch party on Saturday. It's weird to think that had I not sold a book, I'd probably still be working there. I spent a lot of nights, serving seafood, wondering if I'd ever be published, wondering if my dreams would ever come true.

Dinner is pleasant. Most of us are writers, and we talk shop and compare notes. Gary Warren Niebuhr reminds me that I have to be in Milwaukee tomorrow at 10:30AM.

10:30 - Get home. Brief hello to the family before falling asleep.

SUNDAY

6:00AM - Wake up.

6:05 - Panic because I can't find out the address to the place I'm visiting in Milwaukee.

6:07 - My wife suggests I check my website. The info is there. Apparently I'm more organized than I thought.

10:30 - I get to the Sheraton on time, bring in a box of books, and am met by several members of the CLOAK AND CLUE SOCIETY, who are at the bar and immediately buy me a beer.

My kind of crowd.

11:00 - After mingling, we go into the banquet room and eat a damn good buffet. I make sure I introduce myself to everyone in the room.

12:00 - I give a keynote speech. This time, I try to be funny instead of informative, with great results. I may never have a crowd this good again. They laughed at everything, applauded at several different points, and were a joy to talk to.

12:45 - Sign some books, take some pictures, then head for Chicago. I feel energized during the two hour drive. A great event always makes me feel like that.

3:00 - Arrive at the Printer's Row bookfair. Parking costs more than I paid for my shoes. I lug a box of books to the Twilight Tales signing booth, meet everyone, then settle in to sell some.

Perhaps "settle in" is the wrong terminology. I was signing with two other guys, who sat behind their tables and waited for people to approach. I walked out into the stream of bodies and talked to people as they passed, introducing myself.

I sold about 25 books in two hours. I could have done better, but the fair was winding down and so was I.

5:30: Dinner with more writers: Brian Pinkerton, Henry Perez (and his wife Cheryl), Tom Keevers, Raymond Benson, and Robert W. Walker.

9:00 - Get home. Brief hello to family. Crawl into bed, thinking about the summer.

I have to do 38 events in the next 48 days.

I'd better get some sleep.

4 comments

Bloody Mary Book Tour 2005

What's a publisher book tour like? I kept a journal documenting my 11 day tour of the West Coast. Witness the trials and tribulations of a midlist writer far away from home...

Day #1

Sixteen hour day today, and I'm exhausted.

Got into Denver yesterday after a flight delay, and picked up my rental car at the airport, along with a GPS Navigation System.

The GPS is the coolest thing ever invented. It's a cell phone, and you call Dispatch and give them an address, and then the speaker phone tells you when to turn left and right, along with showing arrows on the display. Finding stuff in a strange city has never been easier, and since I'm going to visit 30 bookstores in two days in Colorado, the GPS is a godsend.

TOUR TIP #1: Use a GPS.

My publisher booked me into the Brown Palace Hotel. I was skeptical (Wasn't I good enough for the Gold Palace or the Silver Palace?), but once I arrived I changed my tune.

This is a seriously beautiful hotel. See for yourself at www.brownpalace.com.

Since most bookstores were having Harry Potter parties, I refrained from drive-by signings that night. Instead I plotted a course of action for the next day, prepared my give-away items, and got a full night of sleep.

I woke up this morning at 7AM, shaved and showered, and had a decent breakfast with plenty of water.

Then I set my GPS coordinates and began.

First stop, a Barnes & Noble in Denver. I do my standard drive-by. It consists of:

1. Finding all of my books in the store and bringing them to the Information desk.
2. Introducing myself to the employee at the desk, and signing the copies.
3. Handing the employee a signed WHISKEY SOUR coaster, and explaining what my books are about.
4. Tracking down all the other employees in the store, giving them signed coasters and the book talk.

Simple enough. Takes about fifteen minutes. They had 3 hardcovers and 9 paperbacks.

Next stop, another Barnes & Noble, in Littleton. Drive-by signing. 2 hardcovers, 6 paperbacks.

Next stop, a reading and signing at Murder by the Book in Denver at noon. Besides my stack of coasters, I have some copies of Ellery Queen as give-aways, and airline bottles of Jack Daniels signed in silver marker. The Owner, Lauri Ver Schure, gets a warm greeting and a bottle of Jack.

TOUR TIP #2: Always have something to give the owner and employees.

MBTB is a very cool store, with extensive signed and OOP books, and I browse while waiting for people to arrive. About ten do, and I greet them all before beginning my presentation. I also give away freebies to fans I've met before, or heard from online.

TOUR TIP #3: Give each person in the room a handshake and warm welcome —-and more if you know them.

Lauri brings out a large cake, decorated like the cover of BLOODY MARY, which is lovely. We all have cake, then I do my thing.

My thing consists of a Q & A with myself, asking myself things that I'm often asked. It's funny, informative, and I tailor it to audience reaction.

This audience is very receptive, laughing in all the right places, maintaining a high level of interest. By the end of the talk it's hard to tell who is happy, me or them.

TOUR TIP #4: Rehearse your presentation, but pay attention to your response. Monologues are boring and can be done in an empty room. Storytelling is an active, dynamic thing that requires the audience to participate. If they aren't involved, get them involved by changing tactics.

An author friend of mine, Jim Hansen, came by to see me. I signaled him out and talked a little about his book, NIGHT LAWS, which is a damn good debut.

TOUR TIP #5: Give props to your peeps. If you have published friends in the audience, let the crowd know. Publicity is hard, and writers should help each other.

After the talk, I did a reading, which was met with a positive response.

TOUR TIP #6: When reading, be brief (no more than ten minutes), and if possible, funny. Practice until you're good enough, and make sure the passage you read won't offend anyone (or gross them out).

I signed books after the reading.

TOUR TIP #7: Always ask who they'd like the book inscribed to, and how to spell their name. Trust me on this one. I've met Aymee, Jym, Marscha, Debbera, and Chuk, to misname a few.

When the last person left, I hung around and signed the rest of the stock.

TOUR TIP #8: Don't leave without signing everything.

Then I did some more browsing and bought some books. In this instance, I bought a $50 first edition of Silence of the Lambs.

TOUR TIP #9: When signing at an indie store, always buy something before you leave. Support the folks who support you.

I was there two hours total. Ten books sold, fifteen signed. Plus, they let me keep the rest of the cake (Lemon poppy seed...mmm.)

After the event, Jim Hansen took me out to lunch (Thanks Jim! Everyone buy NIGHT LAWS this January! www.jimhansenbooks.com). Then it was off to HIGH CRIMES in Boulder.

HIGH CRIMES is another awesome store, run by the the wonderful Cynthia Nye.

This was another reading event, and I got there still hyped-up from the good time I had at MBTB. Because of that, I didn't spend time introducing myself to everyone. Instead, I went right into the Joe Konrath Comedy Hour.

Not smart. Rather than get the audience to like me before starting my talk, I went for the big laughs right away and they didn't go over well. Sensing that I was losing the crowd, I reeled in the humor and tried to be more informative and sedate.

That worked better, but trying to win an audience over from an initial bad impression is harder than entertaining a group of people who love you before you begin. Next time, I'll do more schmoozing beforehand and start the ball rolling slowly.

The reading went better than the Q & A, and some folks stuck around to buy books. I then stayed for a while and sold some books to people who came in after my event. I also bought some books that Cynthia recommended, said my thank yous, and got on the road. Ten books sold, twelve signed.

Drive-by at Borders in Boulder. 2 hardcovers, 6 paperbacks. Sold a paperback while I was there.

Drive-by at Barnes & Noble in Boulder. 2 hardcovers, 4 paperbacks.

Drive-by at Borders in Broomfield. 3 hardcovers, 6 paperbacks. Sold a paperback while I was there.

Drive-by at Waldenbooks in Westminster. 2 hardcover, 5 paperbacks.

Drive-by at Waldenbooks in Arvada —-they're closed.

TOUR TIP #10: When planning your drive-by itinerary, check closing times, because some stores close at 8pm.

Drive-by Tattered Cover in Denver. 3 hardcovers, 5 paperbacks, and something cool. In the mystery section is a woman and her daughter, and when they see me grabbing copies of Whiskey Sour, they get excited because they've read it. Naturally I introduce myself, and wind up signing a copy of Bloody Mary for them, and talking for a while.

Meeting fans is always cool.

Back to the hotel, and I'm exhausted. I figure I'll order room service and a massage and put it on my publisher's tab.

Or not.

TOUR TIP #11: Pay for as much as you can on your own. Your publisher is sending you to work, not on a vacation. Hyperion is paying for transportation and lodging. Everything else I'm paying for.

I walk into the lobby with half a BLOODY MARY cake, wondering what I should do with it. As luck would have it, four ladies were having some drinks in the lobby. Still in author mode (which means I'm fearless and will approach anyone) I ask them if they want some cake.

"Hell yeah we want cake!"

One thing led to another, and soon the cake was gone and we were all on our way to Barnes & Noble up the street so I could sign copies of my books for them. Great people. They're from Memphis, here for a convention. If everyone from Memphis is this friendly and fun, I may move there.

After booksigning, we hit an Irish pub and have beer and onion rings, and then it's 1AM and I'm beat.

Back to my luxury suite, where the maid has turned down the bed and left chocolates on the pillow. Very cool.

Sleep beckons, but I want to blog this so I have a record of how things are going. Partly because I want to remember this. Partly to show my publisher, so they know I'm trying my best to sell some books.

I did two signings and seven drive-bys today. Not too bad. Tomorrow I have 19 drive-bys to do. I should have enough time, if I get up early.

Time for bed. I have 11 more days of this tour...

Day #2

I got away with only working twelve hours today. Would have gone longer, but the only bookstores I haven't yet visited close early on Sundays.

Got up at 8AM, then plotted my route for drive-bys. I wanted to visit 18 stores. I figured I could do two stores an hour —-15 minutes of schmoozing, then 15 minutes of travel time.

It took longer than I figured, and I got behind schedule. When I do a drive-by, I always find my books myself and bring them up to the Information Desk.

"This is me," I'll say, smiling and pointing at my book cover. "I'm J.A. Konrath. Can I sign these for you guys?"

I always get a yes. Sometimes they ask questions. Sometimes they're busy. But I still try to pitch the books and hand out signed coasters to as many employees as possible. They are my word-of-mouth army, and I need to stick in their heads.

Sometimes it takes time to find staff, or sometimes they call for managers, and my 15 minute time frame becomes half an hour. I also often wind up talking to customers, passing out signed coasters, and pitching my books to patrons.

Plus, since I hit most of the local stores yesterday, the stores today were farther apart, sometimes by 25 miles. There were several mall stores, and it seemed I always parked ten miles away from where the store was, every time. So I didn't get as much done as I wanted to.

Here are the stats:

Barnes & Noble in Denver, signed 4 hardcovers, 9 paperbacks, sold 1.

Waldenbooks in Denver, signed 4 hardcovers, 2 paperbacks.

Borders in Lakewood, signed 3 hardcovers, 3 paperbacks, sold 1.

Barnes & Noble in Lakewood, signed 4 hardcovers, six paperbacks, sold 2.

Borders in Englewood, signed 3 hardcovers, 2 paperbacks, sold 1.

Borders in Littleton, signed 2 hardcovers, 5 paperbacks.

Waldenbooks in Littleton, signed 4 hardcovers, 6 paperbacks.

Barnes & Noble in Greenwood Village, signed 4 hardcovers, 5 paperbacks.

Barnes & Noble in Lonetree, signed 5 hardcovers and 5 paperbacks.

Borders in Aurora, signed 5 hardcovers and 8 paperbacks.

Barnes and Noble in Aurora, signed 4 hardcovers and 2 paperbacks.

Waldenbooks in Aurora, signed 2 hardcovers and 6 paperbacks.

Barnes & Noble in Westminster, signed 4 hardcovers, 4 paperbacks.

Barnes & Noble in Thornton, signed 4 hardcovers, 7 paperbacks.

Borders in Northglen, signed 4 hardcovers, 4 paperbacks.

So that's 15 stores today, and 9 yesterday, for a total of 24 signing in Colorado in two days.

Will it make a difference? I dunno. I met a lot of booksellers and fans today, and signed over a hundred coasters and plenty of books.

Several employees placed my signed books in a front-of-store display, which should help.

Plus Waldenbooks had them at 20% off, which is good news.

Other good news —-today in the Chicago Sun-Times, I got a tremendous review from David Montgomery. I love that guy. In the New York Times Book Review, you can find an ad for my books that my publisher placed. Plus the latest issue of The Strand Magazine is on the newsstands, featuring an even bigger ad from my publisher, plus an original Harry McGlade story by me called TAKEN TO THE CLEANERS.

Pick it up. It's funny.

So what am I learning on tour so far? Here are more tips.

TOUR TIP #12: Always allow yourself more time than you think you need. Sometimes traffic is bad, or you get lost. Sometimes you stay at a store longer than expected. Visiting two stores an hour was an unrealistic goal. Give yourself wiggle room.

TOUR TIP #13: Save time by finding your books on the shelf and bringing them to the Information Desk to sign them, but ALWAYS ask the staff to check if there are more copies. Several times today, the store had more than I'd found. And it goes without saying that you want to sign everything...

TOUR TIP #14: Stay attached to reality. By my ninth store today, I completely forgot where I was. So I took a little break and called home. Hearing friendly voices helped to take my mind away from the repetition, and made me fresh for the next set of signings.

TOUR TIP #15: Be good to yourself. I ate when hungry, drank plenty of water, and made sure I had some sleep the night before. I couldn't imagine doing this without enough sleep or nourishment —-or even worse, hungover. A healthy tour is a productive tour.

FUN FACT ABOUT COLORADO: It has mountains.

THINGS I WOULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY —Spent more time introducing myself to the audience at High Crimes, visited the stores that closed early first, and eaten someplace other than that burrito stand.

THINGS I NEED TO DO —Plan my attack for Arizona. I'm leaving tomorrow at 6AM, which means I have to pack tonight, plot an itinerary for drive-bys, and contact my wife to have her send me more coasters and give-away magazines —I didn't bring nearly enough.

That's all for now. See you in the desert...

Day #3

Got up at 5am to catch a flight to Phoenix. Made it here by noon.

FUN FACT ABOUT PHOENIX: It's really hot.

National Car Rental gave me a GPS, but a different kind than I was using in Colorado (that was a Nextel, this is a Navman.)

I'm no techneophyte, but the Navman made no sense at all. I was twenty miles away from the car rental place when I realized the problem wasn't me —-it was my unit (insert genital joke here.)

Basically, the GPS was stuck in demo mode, and the little triangle I thought was me was actually a simulation, going down roads that I wasn't on, making turns that I didn't make.

So I'm stuck in the desert with a bum GPS, with no idea of how to get back to the car rental place, because, hey, no GPS.

I did eventually make it back, and the National rep wasn't sympathetic at all to my plight (I spent twelve years in the service industry, and this girl was a waste of carbon.) I wrangled a new GPS, got it working, and finally made it to my hotel by 2pm.

Time to start the drive-bys.

Barnes & Noble in Phoenix on Camelback, signed 3 hardcovers, 4 paperbacks.

Barnes & Noble in Phoenix on Metro, signed 4 hardcovers, 5 paperbacks, sold 1.

Waldenbooks in Phoenix on Metro, signed 3 hardcovers, 5 paperbacks, sold 1.

Waldenbooks in Phoenix on Bell, signed 4 hardcovers, 11 paperbacks, sold 1.

Borders in Phoenix in Fashion Park, signed 3 hardcovers, 6 paperbacks.

Borders in Phoenix on Cactus, signed 3 hardcovers, 6 paperbacks, 2 CDs.

Borders in Glendale on Bell, signed 3 hardcovers, 2 paperbacks.

Borders in Scottsdale on Mayo, signed 1 hardcover, 7 paperbacks.

Barnes & Noble in Scottsdale on Indian Bend, signed 4 hardcover, 9 paperbacks.

Brentano's in Scottsdale on Camelback, signed 10 hardcovers, 10 paperbacks, and was told that a women came in ten minutes before I did and bought both books. Sorry I was late lady, but the store was in a mall, and as I mentioned before, fate rolls the dice and chooses to make me park as far away as humanly possible from the store location. And the malls in Arizona are even larger than the malls in Colorado. I swear, in one mall I walked at least 70 miles. I grew a beard in the time it took to go from Sears to JC Penny.

So ten signings today, for a total of 35 in three days. Someone call the Guinness people.

Better yet, some give me a pint of Guinness.

I have ten more tomorrow, which should be easy, since I have all day. I'm doing an event at 7pm at Poisoned Pen in Scottsdale, which should be fun.

Once again, my publisher has put me up at a nice hotel. And once again, I haven't had time to enjoy it. Speaking of publishers...

TOUR TIP #16: Let your publisher and agent know how the tour is going. Be upbeat and positive. My publicist told everyone at Hyperion how I was doing, which can't hurt their opinion of me. When you make an effort, don't make it in silence.

As for the recent comments pertaining to my sanity, I don't think working hard at something I love is crazy. Getting published is a tremendous opportunity, and the best way to acknowledge such a gift is to work hard to prove it wasn't all just luck.

Which is why I've given up sleep, and tattooed my publisher's name on my forehead. In reverse, so I can read it when I look into the mirror.
Until tomorrow...

Day #4

Long day.

Got up at 6AM and mapped out the drive-bys.

Speaking of drive-bys, here's the Definitive Guide for Doing Drive-By Signings.

1. Find the stores. Go to www.bookweb.org, www.bn.com, www.waldenbooks.com, www.borders.com, www.booksamillion.com, and search for stores by city and zip code. Or go to the public library and look through the phones books. Try to list all the stores within 20 miles of the city you're visiting.

2. Call the stores you intend to drop in on and ask someone if they carry your books. DO NOT tell them you're the author. Why? All that does is complicate things. Trust me on this. They'll tell you you have to speak to a manager, or an events coordinator, or they'll tell you you aren't allowed to come in unless it has been cleared by your publisher, or they'll tell you that they don't do signings, or they'll set the books aside and then no one will be able to find them when you come in, or you'll set everything up and when you get there no one will know who the hell you are, or... you get the point.

The truth is, bookstores and publishers have a set of rules about author signings.

You want to ignore those rules. So call and and see if they have copies, and ask how many. I wouldn't drive 20 miles to sign three paperbacks, but for three hardcovers I would.

Call a day or two before you plan on dropping by —-calling ten days before may result in your books being gone by then.

3. Map out your route. www.mapquest.com, www.maps.yahoo.com, www.maps.google.com. Plot a course going point to point. A GPS navigation unit saves a lot of time and effort.

I've noticed that Barnes & Noble and Borders stores often have locations just a few miles from one another. If there's one, there may be another.

Independent booksellers are generally happier to see you, and more eager to sell your stuff. Fit as many of these into the drop-in tour as possible.

4. When you get to a store, find your books. Booksellers are busy, and you want to be low maintenance and take up very little of their time.

On this tour, my books are either on the new release table, the 20% off table, or in the mystery section. Sometimes there will be extra copies on the floor, or stacked behind other books on the shelf. Look around.

5. Take your books to the Information Desk, or to a counter, and say your spiel to an employee. Mine is:

"Hi! This is me. (Smiling, pointing to my name on cover.) I'm an author. Great to meet you. (Shake hand.) Thanks for carrying my books! Do you mind if I sign them?"
Start signing when you get the 'yes.'

Then ask them if they like your genre, and tell them about your books. For the pitch I use, check out my website at www.jakonrath.com/tips6.html —- it's the same pitch I use to sell to customers.

While talking to the employee, give them something —-a card, a bookmark, or in my case, a drink coaster with my book cover on it, and SIGN THE ITEM. Signing it will hopefully prevent them from throwing the item away, on the off chance that one day you'll be famous and they can sell it on eBay.

Also, ask them if they can check to see if there are any more in the store that you couldn't find. Be patient —-if the store is busy, let them take care of customers before you. That gives you a chance to pitch to customers as well.

When the books are signed, ask if they have stickers that say "Autographed Copy". If they do, help them sticker the books. If they don't, use your own stickers, that you took from the last store you signed at.

Barnes & Noble have square green stickers. Borders and Waldenbooks have red triangles. Sometimes Waldenbooks has blue rectangles, and Borders has brown rectangles. Don't get confused.

After the books are signed and stickered, ask the employees to sell them.

"Please get rid of these for me... my kids need to eat."

Often they'll make a display for you. Don't suggest a display yourself —let them suggest it. This appeal for help is important —it shows you're not a snooty author, but a regular person who needs help.

I also tell employees that whoever sells 20 copies or more will be mentioned in the acknowledgements for my next book.

6. Meet as many employees in the store that you can, passing out signed cards. Thank them profusely for selling your book, and for the great job they're doing. Take their business cards, and add them to your email newsletter list.

7. If you're at an independent bookstore, never leave without buying something. If you want them to support you, you should support them.

8. Keep a log of where you visited and how many copies you signed. Share this info with your agent and publisher. You don't have to give them the full list, but an email saying, "I was just in Arizona for the weekend and signed stock at 21 bookstores" will impress them.

So now you know as much as I know. And how was my day? I'm glad you asked.

After planning my route, I hit the road.

Waldenbooks in Mesa, signed 5 hardcovers, 5 paperbacks.

Borders in Mesa, signed 3 hardcovers, 6 paperbacks.

Borders in Tempe, signed 3 hardcovers, 5 paperbacks.
Changing Hands Bookstore in Tempe, signed 7 hardcovers, 1 paperback.

Borders in Chandler, signed 2 hardcovers, 4 paperbacks.

Barnes & Noble in Chandler, signed 3 hardcovers, 2 paperbacks.

Barnes & Noble in Phoenix, signed 3 hardcovers, 6 paperbacks, sold 2.

Waldenbooks on Southern, signed 8 hardcovers.

Borders on 74th, signed 6 hardcovers, 6 paperbacks.

Barnes & Noble in Gilbert, signed 2 hardcovers, 2 paperbacks.

SCARY STUFF —The computer at B&N in Gilbert said there were 4 copies of Whiskey Sour in the store. We could only find two. Turns out they stripped and returned the other two that morning.

Whiskey Sour came out in paper on June 24. So in less than a month, they were destroyed. Ouch!

I did a talk and a signing with the talented and charming Louise Ure (Forcing Amaryllis —-which everyone should read) at The Poisoned Pen. We had a nice crowd, and Louise is 100% pro, even though her book has been out for less than a month. It was a pleasure sharing the spotlight with her.

Some friends came to the event, including fellow scribe Stacey Cochran and some folks I knew back when I was a waiter. Naturally, we went out afterwards for beer. Beer became tequila prairie fire shots, but I had to wuss out early (2AM) because I have to catch a plane in a few hours.

Tomorrow (er... later today) I'll be in San Diego, and I'll also blog about some fellow authors who are kicking major tail on the self-promotion front. You think I'm the only one pushing myself to the limit? Think again...

Day #5

Has it only been five days? Seems longer.

Got into San Diego around noon, picked up the rental car, checked into the slum that is the Westgate Hotel, and started the drive-bys.

Baja Books, signed 3 paperbacks.

B. Dalton on Horton, signed 2 hardcovers, 3 paperbacks.

Barnes & Noble on Hazard, signed 4 hardcovers, 6 paperbacks.

Barnes & Noble on Grossmont, signed 4 hardcovers, 8 paperbacks, sold 1.

Bookstar on Rosecrans, signed 2 hardcovers, 2 paperbacks.

Borders on Camino del Rio, signed 2 hardcovers, 6 paperbacks, sold 1.

Borders on 6th, signed 2 hardcvoers, 6 paperbacks.

Waldenbooks on Friars, signed 6 hardcovers, 6 paperbacks.

Then I got stuck in some serious rush hour traffic, and it took 90 minutes to get to my signing that night, at Mysterious Galaxy.

Huge crowd. The store was packed.

Unfortunately, they were all there to see Jeff Shelby. Jeff's novel KILLER SWELL (great debut, go buy it right now) just came out, and he'd apparently invited everyone he'd ever known since Kindergarten to the event.

Jeff's a great guy, and funny (much like his books), so we talked to the crowd for an hour and got some big laughs.

Then came an exercise in humility —-sitting next to the guy who has a line of fifty people waiting for autographs, when you only have a line of three.

If you're a writer, get used to it. It will happen many times in your career.

The staff at Mysterious Galaxy was great, I signed over 50 books, and afterward went out to dinner with writer Douglas Gibbs and his wife, and writer Mario Avecedo.

Got home at 11PM, so tired I couldn't even blog. Had a fitful seven hours of sleep, and right after I finish typing this I'm off to LA for drive-bys (do they have drive-bys in LA?) and an event at The Mysterious Bookshop tonight at 7pm.

Hope to see some of you there!

FUN FACT ABOUT SAN DIEGO —It's in California.

TOUR RESULTS SO FAR: 54 bookstores visited. I'm on track to break 100. Place your bets...

Day #6

Not a very productive day today, due to L.A. traffic, which ranks just below kidney stones on my "Things I Hate" list.

Though I spent about 10 hours in the car, I only managed to visit 8 bookstores:

Borders Orange County, signed 1 hardcover, 6 paperbacks.

Barnes & Noble in Irvine, signed 3 hardcovers, 2 paperbacks.

Barnes & Noble #2 in Irvine, signed 4 hardcovers, 8 paperbacks.
Borders in Beverly Hills, signed 1 hardcover and 3 paperbacks.

Borders in Westwood, signed 2 hardcovers and 3 paperbacks.

Barnes & Noble in Westwood, signed 4 hardcovers (couldn't find the paperbacks... I fear they were stripped)

Barnes & Noble at Farmer's Market, signed 4 hardcovers, 6 paperbacks.

There were plenty of other stores I could have visited, but just didn't have the time.

My event tonight was at the Mysterious Bookshop in Westwood, and at 7:00pm I was greated by my throng of fan.

No typo there. One guy showed up (thanks, Stephen Blackmoore!)

That didn't discourage me, because, hey, one guy showed up. Steve's a writer too, and we talked shop for a while. He discovered me through my blog, which was a nice thing to hear —-it's nice to know that my words are getting through to you folks. Or, at the very least, getting through to Steve.

Happily, the bookstore had a stack or pre-orders for me to sign, as well as a big pile of stock, which always makes me happy. It was great meeting the managers, Bobby and Linda. They're good people.

Then I signed the infamous Jail Register, a massive book that they've been keeping since the year 2000. Every author that comes in signs their name and vital stats, and everyone tries to be clever.

I saw a lot of famous names, which was cool.

I also saw many more names that I didn't recognize at all, which was very uncool.

I know quite a few folks in the writing community, but about 75% of those names were alien to me.

Hundreds of unknown writers. How many never wrote a second book? How many lost their publisher? How many are chugging along at book #7 and still midlist?

Five years from now, will I be one of the recognizable names, or one of the forgotten hundreds?
Scary, sobering stuff...

As I promised, I wanted to share with my blog readers (hi, Steve!) some names of other authors who also kick-butt on the self-promotion front, to prove that I'm not the only grunt in the trenches.

Barry Eisler has been touring for a solid month, driving coast to coast and visiting dozens of stores. He's also fitting in an occasional TV and radio gig. Barry is very savvy when it comes to promotion, and is a wealth of information and ideas when it comes to that subject. Most importantly, it's working for him. His driving tour is costing his publisher less than the flying/escort standard, but he's able to get more done.

Is it working? He's got a movie option, a Barry Award nomination (no relation), a second printing on his latest book, and he's an IMBA bestseller.

Julia Spencer-Fleming may actually be doing more than I do on the self-promotion front. Assisted by her marketing-genius husband Ross, Julia does drive-bys like crazy. She calls them 'force multipliers' (great term) and believes they've helped double the sales of her latest book at the chains. She also does massive mailing campaigns, and networks like crazy.

Is it working? She's an IMBA bestseller, is currently nominated for a Barry Award, and appeared on the Amazon top 25 for her latest book.

I'll list more authors tomorrow. Now. Must. Sleep...

FUN FACT ABOUT LOS ANGELES: The traffic sucks.

Day #7

Afraid of being stuck in LA traffic while my plane to San Francisco left without me, I got up three hours before my flight to drive the 13 miles to LAX.

I got there right on time, so naturally my flight was delayed for an hour.

After boarding, the plane did the runway shuffle for another 90 minutes. Upon completing our fifth circle of the airport, awaiting take-off clearance, the little girl sitting next to me turned to her mother and said, "Maybe the plane hasn't learned how to fly yet."

From hotel to hotel, the trip took nine hours. Next time I'll drive.

Of course, my publisher put me up in another nice hotel —The Hotel Monoco. Not quite as posh as Le Meridien of Beverly Hills where I stayed yesterday, but I'd be a fool to complain. I just wish I had time to enjoy these hotels...

The drive-by report:

Bookstore at LAX, signed three paperbacks.

Bookstore at San Francisco airport, signed and sold one paperback.

Borders on 3rd, signed 2 hardcovers, 5 paperbacks.

Barnes & Noble on Taylore, signed 2 hardcovers, 3 paperbacks.

Borders on Post, signed 5 hardcovers, 7 paperbacks.

San Francisco Mystery Bookstore, signed 3 hardcovers, 6 paperbacks.

A Clean Well Lighted Place for Books, signed 1 hardcover, 3 paperbacks.

My event was at M is for Mystery in San Mateo. I'd never been there before, but I met the lovely Ed Kaufman last year at the cocktail party Hyperion threw for Whiskey Sour's release.

Great store. And Ed's a great guy.
A handful of people showed up, and we formed a circle with our chairs and I spoke for an hour about my books, and publishing in general. The majority of them were writers, which makes me believe that my website and my blog are being read.

It also makes me proud to be a part of this business. I try to help writers, and in turn they come to my signings and help me by buying my books.

After signing a stack of 25 hardcovers and a few paperbacks, I promised Ed I'd drop by his booth at the 10th Annual Books by the Bay Festival tomorrow. Then the writers (Tammy Durston, Susan Tunis, and Ronald Cree) took me out for beer and food.

Ronald Cree just sold his first novel, a YA mystery called Desert Blood 10pm/9C and he's got the right attitude for the task ahead —-work your butt off and make money for your publisher. I think he'll do fine. It's coming out in February and he's already planning for publicity and touring. Corner him at Bouchercon and say hello.

And as promised, here are more self-promoters that I admire:

David Ellis. Dave didn't tour for his latest book. Instead, he wrote 200 letters to reviewers and sent them out along with ARCs. It took a lot of work and research, but it paid off. Reviewers are flooded with books sent by publishers, but a major release sent by the author, complete with a personal, signed letter, got Dave noticed. In The Company of Liars had more reviews, and as a result higher sales, than his previous three novels. And the reviewers will remember him for his next novel.

Of course, it didn't hurt that the book (written entirely in reverse chronological order) is fabulous.

Dave has also revamped his website, and it's full of information and a lot of fun to surf.

PJ Parrish. Kristy and Kelly Montee write the Louis Kincaid series under the name PJ Parrish, and they do a lot of self-promotion. They tour. They attend conventions. They help run Sleuthfest, which is Florida's biggest mystery conference. And now, they also blog.

Drop by http://pjparrish.blogspot.com.

TOUR UPDATE — I've visited 70 stores so far. Will I break 100 with only 4 days left in the tour?

You can check my progress in tomorrow's episode...

Day #8

No scheduled signings today, only drive-bys:

B. Dalton in 1 Embarcadero Center signed 2 hardcovers, 2 paperbacks, sold 2.

Borders on Winston signed 4 hardcovers, 6 paperbacks.

Waldenbooks in 4 Embaracdero Center, signed 3 hardcovers, 6 paperbacks. (They were closed, due to flooding, but let me in to sign. Hundreds of books were ruined by water damage, but mine were okay. Perhaps they should have a liquidation sale...)

Waldenbooks on Portal, signed 2 hardcovers, 5 paperbacks.

Stacey's on Market, signed 2 hardcovers, 2 paperbacks.

Cody's on Stockton —dropped by, but they weren't open.

Books Inc on Market, signed 1 paperback.

Barnes & Noble in Berkley, signed 4 hardcovers, 4 paperbacks.

Cody's on Telegraph, signed 2 hardcovers, 4 paperbacks.

Moe's in Berkley, signed 4 paperbacks.

Cody's on 4th, signed 2 hardcovers, 2 paperbacks, sold 1.

Borders on Shellmound, signed 3 hardcovers, five paperbacks, sold 1.

Waldenbooks on 14th street —-closed ten minutes before I got there, dammit.

Barnes & Noble on Bay, signed 4 hardcovers, 6 paperbacks, sold 1.

Barnes & Noble on Broadway, signed 4 hardcovers, 6 paperbacks.

I also dropped by the 10th Annual Books by the Bay Festival and met authors Leslie Glass and Rhys Bowen —both very classy ladies (you must buy their books). I also met Dylan Schaffer, who beat me out for the Gumshoe Award and is also up against me for the Macavity. Great guy (and a great writer, buy his books). I wouldn't have found him if it wasn't for the savvy Susan Tunis (thanks, Susan!)

I spent a few minutes at the M is for Mystery booth and handsold 3 hardcovers and 3 paperbacks, and then I schmoozed other indie booksellers, including folks from Cody's, Stacey's, and the Alexander Book Company.

TOUR STATS: To date, I've signed roughly 740 books at 83 bookstores, and passed out 550 signed Whiskey Sour coasters to booksellers, fans, and customers. Each person who gets a coaster gets to hear my pitch.

Lee Goldberg asked if this is worth it, to which I whole-heartedly respond: I don't know.

I do know I've met some great people who will continue to sell my books after I've left. I know I've spread a lot of good will, got the word out there, and will be remembered. I know that it beats sitting at home and hoping my books sell on their own.

But is the result with the time, effort, and money put in?

Time will tell...

FUN FACT ABOUT SAN FRANCISCO: The hit song by the Village People, San Fransisco, was about San Francisco.

Day #9

Apparently, everything in Portland closes at 7pm, which put a serious crimp in my drive-by schedule.

I got up early to catch my flight to Oregon, only to watch it be delayed for an hour.

TOUR TIP #16: Don't fly if you can avoid it. My next tour will be more driving, less flying. Then I'll have more time to visit stores, and spend less time in airports being delayed.

That said, I got to Portland within an hour of my event at Murder by the Book, and had to hustle to make it in time.

I had an hour of solo, plus another hour with two other mystery writers, the talented Ron Lovell and the remarkable Shirley Tallman. Shirley impressed me so much with her wit, candor, and experience, that I plunked down the money for her historical mystery The Russian Hill Murders even though I've never

bought a period book before in my life. If, like me, you thought historicals were slow-moving and sans action, think again —-this one is a race car.

The event was well attended, and the owner, Carolyn Lane, was a great host who kept things moving at a good pace.

After signing twenty books, I got a lesson on Oregon hospitality. Barbara Tom, who works at MBTB, took pity on me when I lamented my lack of a GPS unit (the rental car company didn't have any) and offered to drive me to a nearby Best Buy so I could purchase one.

For all she knew, I might have been a violent maniac. But still offered to give me a lift since the store was closing in twenty minutes and I didn't know the area.

Turns out, Barb was the violent maniac. A believer in karma, Barb must have been a New York cabbie in a former life, because she drove like the car was on fire. We made it to the store in time, I plunked down some big bucks for a GPS, and then Barb topped her kindness by showing my where the local Powell's bookstore was, so I could do a drive-by.

Thanks again, Barb. You're good people.

I managed only four drive-bys, which meant I had time to relax and enjoy the lovely Heathman Hotel, right?

Wrong. I got back to my room and rather than unwind, I was up until the wee hours trying to figure out my new GPS toy and programming it for my car trip to Seattle the next day.

Drive-bys:

Powell's Portland Airport, signed 3 paperbacks.

Powell's on Hawthorne, signed 1 hardcover, 2 paperbacks.
Powell's on Burnside, signed 2 hardcovers, 2 paperbacks.

Borders on 3rd street —closed ten minutes before I got there.

TOUR SO FAR: I've signed 770 books at 87 bookstores. I have two days in Washington. We'll see what kind of damage I can do there.

FUN FACT ABOUT PORTLAND — Portland has 37,000 acres of green parks, and they all close at 7PM.

COLLECTION UPDATE —With the Heathman, I've now acquired 28 little bottles of shampoo and conditioner, 12 bottles of hand cream, 32 bars of soap, two sets of ear plugs, two eye masks, seven chocolate candies, three sewing kits, and a complimentary bottle of spring water.

Plus seven hairdryers, six coffee makers, 19 towels, five robes, three clock radios, a lamp, and a framed Warhol litho.

And don't even get me started on the mini-bars. I totaled up the cost of all the goodies in the room, and they're worth over seventeen thousand dollars.

Hotels are cool.

Day #10

Leaving the Heathman Hotel was tougher than expected. Not because I was sad to go, but because they somehow had no record of me staying there, making it a bit difficult to check out.

That never got fully straightened out, even though I had plenty of time, because the valet had apparently parked my car in Amsterdam —that's about how long it took to find.

Since I was driving to Seattle, and had a noon signing, I didn't find any of this amusing.

When I finally did get my car back, I broke the land speed record for Chevy Malibus (almost 83mph) and made it to the Seattle Mystery Bookshop with twenty minutes to spare.

There was a big crowd —-all there for Jasper Fforde, who was signing with me. I pitched my books to the folks waiting in Jasper's long line and managed to sell quite a few. I also had some actual fans come to see me, which is always nice.

Jasper was a pleasant enough guy, English, polite and quick with the quip. I bought a copy of his latest book. He didn't return the favor.

TOUR TIP #17: When doing a signing with another author, buy their book. This not only supports the bookseller, but your fellow authors.

I wound up signing 30 books, then sticking around and handselling the remainder of my paperbacks before hitting the drive-by trail:

Barnes & Noble on Pine, signed 4 hardcovers, 2 paperbacks.
Borders on 4th, signed 3 hardcovers —-they couldn't find my paperbacks (stripped?)

B. Dalton in Factoria Square didn't have any books at all. I introduced myself to the employees and made sure they ordered some (should have phoned first.)

Waldenbooks on Pine, closed a few months ago (phone first.)

Borders in Bellevue, closed last month (dammit dummy, start phoning first!)

Barnes & Noble in Bellevue, 4 hardcovers, 4 paperbacks.

Borders in Redmond, 5 hardcovers, 5 paperbacks.

Barnes & Noble in Woodinville, 4 hardcovers, 3 paperbacks.

Barnes & Noble in Federal Way, signed 3 hardcovers, 4 paperbacks.

Borders in Federal Way, signed 2 hardcovers, 3 paperbacks.

Since my brother lives in Seattle, I decided to stay with him and save the publisher some cash.

TOUR TIP #18: Try to alleviate some of the publisher's touring expense when you can. I pay for my own food, extra gas, and never charge anything to the hotel rooms.

Apparently, I alleviated more cost than I thought. My publicist emailed, worried because i hadn't checked into the Heathman last night. This told me three things:

1. Your publisher is always watching you while you're touring.
2. My publisher seems to actually care about me.
3. The Heathman is run by a group of trained chimps.

TOUR STATS: I've signed 853 books at 96 bookstores, and have signed and handed out 700 coasters.

The GPS unit I purchased, a Garmin c330, is far superior to the rental units I've had. This thing comes preloaded with 5 million business addresses, and every map in the US. So when I'm driving, I can type in "Borders" and it lists them all within a hundred miles. This is much easier.

Next tour I'll do a lot more driving, hitting stores along the way, and much less air travel, which is expensive, exhausting, and a time waster. Had I driven this entire tour, it would have taken perhaps three more days, but I would have been able to visit 50 more stores. A much better bang for the buck.

Only four more stores to reach the exalted 100. We'll see what happens...

Day #11 —Last Day of Book Tour

Today was an all drive-by day, no event signings scheduled.

I tell you, I question the wisdom of sleeping on my brother's couch vs. a bed in a 5 star hotel. Though I didn't get to enjoy the facilities at any of the hotels, they sure had nice beds.

My brother has a lumpy couch. Plus he's got one of those hairless Japanese dogs that heats up to about 120 degrees and likes to sleep on people's heads. Not the best night of sleep I've had on tour.

I woke up early, took the dog off my face, and began the drive-bys:

Borders in Tukwila, signed 3 hardcovers and 8 paperbacks.

Barnes & Noble in Tukwila, signed 4 hardcovers and 5 paperbacks.

Waldenbooks in Tukwila, signed 3 hardcoveras and 5 paperbacks.

Borders in Tacoma, signed 4 hardcovers and 15 papebacks, sold 1.

Waldenbooks in Tacoma, signed 2 hardcovers and 5 paperbacks, sold 2.

Whoddunit Books in Olympia, signed 1 paperback, but chatted witht he owner and she'll order many more.

B. Dalton in Olympia, signed 2 paperbacks.

Barnes & Noble in Olympia, signed 2 hardcovers and 10 paperbacks, sold 1.

Barnes & Noble in Lakewood, signed 4 hardcovers and 9 paperbacks.

FINAL TOUR TOTALS: I signed a total of 933 books at 105 bookstores, and passed out 775 signed coasters. I shook hands with over 300 booksellers and hundreds of customers and fans.

FINAL THOUGHTS: After hitting the 100th store, there was no ticker tape parade or round of applause. All I felt was tired, and somewhat overwhelmed. There are over 5000 bookstores in the US, and I'd only visited less than 2% of them. Does that make a difference? Will all of this hard work impact my numbers significantly?

Rather than be satisfied with a job well done, I can only think of the work left to do. I take the red-eye home tomorrow morning, but instead of going home I have an event in Wisconsin that night. Then, a day to play catch up (I'm judging a Writer's Digest contest) and then off to Michigan for a week for more drive-bys during my family vacation.

But I'm happy I hit my goal of 100, and I believe I've impressed my publisher, which is a good thing.

While the publisher sponsored part of the tour has ended, I'll continue touring for the rest of the year, doing events and drive-bys, getting my name out there.

But for the time being, I think I'll have a beer...

Drinks are on Ed

I've always understood the value of libraries.

Not only do they buy a good number of books (there are over 10,000 of them in the USA,) but a lot of readers become fans in libraries, and librarians love to talk about titles that they enjoy. They're great for word-of-mouth.

An added benefit to libraries is that they often have authors come in to speak. Some will even pay you for the honor, and you can sell books afterward.

So when a library wants me there, I try to make every effort to go. Which is what I did last weekend.

Spencer Indiana is about 250 miles away from my house. I drive a Land Rover, which can climb up the sides of boulder-strewn mountains and plow through raging rivers (very important in the suburbs of Chicago) but gets only about three miles to the gallon. With gas prices these days, a 500 mile round trip costs somewhere in the neighborhood of $77,325.

Not the most effective use of an author's money and time, you say? Especially since you geographically-savvy folks know that Spencer has a population of under 3000 people?

Well, a promo opportunity is a promo opportunity, and I loaded up the truck with beef jerky and energy drinks and went to see the Hoosiers.

Laura Stantz, Owen County Library's Events Coordinator, lured me there with promises of a free hotel room, free food, and free beer, so I figured I'd wind up ahead on the deal. I was to do a signing at the library from noon until three, then from six until ten I was to do another signing at the neighrbood bar and grill, Ed O'Brien's.

My expectations weren't very high —the most books I'd ever sold at a library event was 14. I had about 35 books with me, which should be more than enough.

My arrival at the library was met with much enthusiasm by the librarians, Laura, Beth Williams, and Brenda Curry. They'd hung posters around town advertising the event.

Unfortunately, their best efforts only drew a precocious 15 year old kid named Ben.

But I'm used to playing without an audience, so I circulated through the library (ha!) and met some patrons. In three hours, I'd sold 20 books. Not too shabby.

Afterwards, I did drive-by signings at the Bloomington Barnes & Noble and Borders, both of which had ample supplies, and then headed for the bar.

Ed O'Brien's was a small, intimate place, and I liked it immediately. Besides having me there, they also had live music in the form of the Jeff Waggoner band. I hung out with many literary-minded folks, including Jennifer Vibbert, Genny Coppedge, Brad and Jen Frye, Gwen Dieter, and Ed himself. Good people.

They fed me, gave me large amounts of beer, and bought the rest of my books. I also had a lot of fun.

I often talk about cost vs. value and effectiveness vs. effort. I preach that publishing is a business, and should be treated as such.

But this business isn't always just about numbers, or the bottom line, or the red and the black, or time and money.

It's also about people.

I've done over 300 signings in the past two years. I've forgotten most of them.

This one I won't forget.

How often can you say that?

To those authors who refuse to do drive-by signings because they don't feel it's worth the gas, and the authors that refuse to do events because they feel their time is better spent writing, and the authors who count every promotional penny and constantly fret about time and money, I say: Look at the bigger picture.

And to the wonderful people of Spencer Indiana, population 3000: Thanks for the great time. I'll be back.

13 comments

Dirty Little Booksignings Secrets

Bob's Indie Bookstore is approached by Author X to do a signing.

"I'm local," says Author X. "My books even take place in this town."

"Have you had any signings yet?"

"Only for my booklaunch party."

Bob crunches the numbers in his head. Since Author X has already had a booklaunch party, none of her friends or family will show up to this signing because they already own the book. While Author X is with a big publisher, meaning the books will be easier to get, she isn't a lead title, meaning no big press or promotional push by the publisher. This is a risky proposition.

But even though he's been burned by signings before, he decides to take a chance and agrees. Local indies are supposed to support authors. They book a signing.

Bob contacts Author X's publicist, and the publisher agrees to pay Bob coop money to promote the event. Forty dollars worth. But Joe must match that number with money of his own, and also guarantee an order of 40 books.

With the eighty dollars, Joe prints up some flyers to give to his customers, and buys some snacks and soda for the event. He calls both local papers to tell them about the signing, and puts it on his website.

Bob orders the 40 books from the publisher, which is good because he gets a steeper discount than from the distributors and doesn't have to pay for shipping. The books are $23.95, and he gets them at 40% off, or $14.37 each.

The publisher bills Bob $574.80 for the books, minus the $40 in coop.

The event arrives. Five people show up. Only three buy books. The author sits behind her table and refuses to mingle with the other customers in the store. She stays for two hours, signs the remaining stock, takes home some of the chips and cookies, and leaves without buying anything.

Bob is stuck with 37 books. He keeps three of them, then ships back the other 34, UPS ground shipping costing him $37. Add in the $40 Bob spent promoting the event, and it cost him $77 to make $43.17. Bob lost $34 on this signing. If he sells those three signed hardcovers he kept, he'll just about break even.

And that's why many indies don't like signings.

Chains, on the other hand, often employ an event person whose job is to book signings. While the local and new author signings rarely make money, chains can get more coop and better discounts from the publishers. They ship so many books back to the publisher that returns cost less per book. And since a large chain store has many times the traffic of a small indie, the chains will sell more autographed books after an author leaves.

Plus, the employees booking signings at a chain store aren't gambling with their own money, like an indie owner does.

As for second book/third book, here's what can happen.

Book #1 is an unknown. Everyone is hoping for a winner. Expectations are high. There are many signings booked, hoping for a hit.

Book #1 has a sell through of 65%, which is pretty good for a first hardcover, but not the hit everyone hoped for.

A year passes. Book #2 comes out, along with the paperback of Book #1. Bookstores look at the sales from the hardcover of Book #1, see they aren't extraordinary, and order fewer copies of Book #2 because they expect to sell fewer —and it's not enough copies to warrant having the author do a signing. So the author is told no by both the store and their publisher, who doesn't want to pay the coop.

But time is on an author's side. Many of those hardcovers of Book #1 still sell into the second year. Add in Book #2, and the paperback sales of Book #1 —which had a much higher print run than the hardcover —and there are suddenly a lot of books in print which have been read by a lot of people.

The bookseller looks at the overall numbers, which are now much higher, and by the time Book #3 comes out, the author is wanted for signings again.

How much does this effect overall sales? Book signings are a very small percentage of overall sales. Even if you're very motiviated. By rough calculation, I've signed over 20,000 books. That's a lot, until you figure I have several hundred thousand in print.

But even though signed books sell better than unsigned, and even though booksignings do offer a measure of local media publicity, the real reason you do them is to meet booksellers.

Becoming friends with a motivated bookseller is worth a lot. I know a dozen booksellers who have each handsold hundreds of my books. In some locations, they've sold as many as six hundred copies. How much is that worth?

I know over a hundred other booksellers who have handsold smaller, but still substantial, numbers.

Plus, these booksellers put me face-out on endcaps without my publisher paying coop. They pimp my books to reading groups and book clubs, and write about them in their newsletters. They invite me to speak at their sales meeting and conventions —-I get these gigs from booksellers I've met, not through my publisher.

Add in the snowball effect —-each handsold book reaches a reader who becomes a lifelong fan, buying many books and telling their friends and family about me, and suddenly spending a week driving around and signing stock in bookstores seems a lot smarter than a newspaper ad or printing up a bunch of bookmarks.

Then come the intangible benefits of touring.

I just got back from 8 days in Italy, with my family. My publisher brought us there, and they paid for everything. I wouldn't have an Italian publisher if it wasn't for meeting them while touring the US.

I've been invited to speak in New York by Google, I've been featured in Forbes, and I've gotten free rides to over a dozen conferences, book festivals, and conventions. Not because my publisher set these things up. But because these people contacted me, having heard about my promo efforts or having met me on the road.

I was recently invited to a major chain store regional meeting. I was the sole author there, and I spoke for forty minutes to a group of 250 bookstore general managers, along with some higher ups including the vice president of the company. How much is that worth?

My publisher is behind me, but the more I do, the more they do.

For my first book, they printed up promo material, had a big launch party at BEA, and made sure my books were in the stores. But they forbade me from touring, because a publisher must pay a store coop money when the author does a signing, They figured I was a new author, and I couldn't sell enough books to justify the coop cost, so they told me I couldn't do any signings.

I did signings anyway, calling them 'drop-ins' instead of official signings, then staying for six hours and handselling hardcovers. Success at one store led to invites from others, which eventually led to the DM of a chain calling me up and inviting me to over a dozen stores. The increased sales in these stores made a blip on the inventory radar, leading to increased sales nationwide in this chain.

For book #2, my publisher toured me. 11 cities. That wouldn't have happened if not for my success with book #1. I used the rental car and dropped in an additional 95 stores, in between interviews and official signings.

For book #3, my publisher paid all expenses for me to visit 618 stores. I met over 1300 bookstore employees. Shook their hands. Pitched my series to them. Gave them free signed books. Then I thanked each, by name, in the acknowledgments of book #4. How much is that worth?

For book #4, my publisher has received it's biggest preorder ever. They're dumping all of their marketing dollars into front-of-store coop and discounts.

I'm just a midlist mystery author. But I've earned out my advance on my first 3 book, six figure contract, and my brand is growing.

I think booksignings had a little something to do with it.

Can everyone do the same thing I did? No. But the fact remains, the more promotion you do, the more books you'll sell, the more good things that happen.

As writers, we get paid for our words. We're paid, because publishers sell our words to readers. If the readers don't buy our books, the publishers will stop paying us.

It is obviously in an author's best interest to help those books sell. Booksignings are one of those things we can do. Idealistically, they also pave the way for future book orders.

But —and this is weird —even if a book sells well in a store, the store may not order more copies, or copies of the author's future books. I've found this happens more often in indie stores than in chains.

Maybe because it is a greater risk for indies. They'll special order a book that a customer wants, because they won't have to pay to return it. But ordering five books from a local author is a risk, because they have to pay to return them if they don't sell. And in an indie store, which has limited space, everything on the shelf has to be a guaranteed seller, or at least as close to a guarantee as possible.

I just proved this a few days ago signing around Chicago with some local authors. We visited several chain stores. A few of them ordered more copies of our books.

Then we visited an indie store that is known for author events. I'd recently attended an event there with an author friend, and while there I met all the employees and did my schtick, getting assurances they'd order my books.

When I returned, they didn't have any of my books. Granted, I could have followed-up with a phone call, let them know I was coming, so they could have had some for when I arrived. But that sort of defeats the idea of making an impression so the employees handsell them. If I didn't make enough of an impression meeting them the first time (and giving them a free book as well) what good would a follow-up call do?

They had signed copies of books from authors who had done events there in the past; exactly two copies each of the signed books. Since I'd been to some of those events, I knew there were a lot more than two copies left over. Those big orders were returned to the publisher, even though they were signed.

So why does this store have so many author events?

I have a theory based on what I've heard and witnessed.

Let's say a store orders forty copies, and gets forty bucks in coop from the publisher. It keeps the forty in coop (no advertising, no promo), doesn't match the forty like it is supposed to, and announces the event on its website and calls the local papers.

The publisher sends forty books, the store sells five, earning fifty dollars (ten bucks a book on a $25 hardcover). So far it is has made a profit of $90, since it has kept the coop. Then is sends the other 32 books back, at a cost of $30for shipping, keeping two on the shelf.

The store has profited $60, plus, because it sells coffee and wine, made money on those during the author event.

Do stores pocket coop? Some do. In fact, many stores, both indie and chain, get coop money for displays that are never used. Some booksllers don't relish extra work, and many won't put together a cardboard cameo dump box and set it up next to the register, even though the publisher pays for the space. Plus the stores gets extra coop money for ordering the 30 paperbacks that go into the dump box.

Those paperbacks stay in the back room and never make it to the floor. I know this for a fact. I've seen it. And with paperbacks, there is no shipping cost to return them —the bookstore rips off the covers and gets full credit from the publisher, pocketing the coop.

It gets better. When a publisher is trying to break out a book, they'll often sweeten the coop. I've heard of instances where a publisher will pay a bookstore ten dollars cash for every ten copies of a book they order, regardless of if these books are returned or not. A bookstore can order a hundred books, sell ten, earn $250, then ship the other 90 back for $75, still pocketing $175 for only selling ten books.

And we wonder why there are piles and piles of remainders for $3.99 each?

The new trend is "remainder on shelf" so the bookseller doesn't even have to pay to return it. If the hardcover doesn't sell, the bookseller can discount it 50% and still make a nice profit without paying for shipping.

Some indies can only stay in business by doing things like this. They'll also sell publisher posters, displays, and galleys, ARCs, and the free books they're sent as reader copies. They'll also return remainder copies at full price to get credit.

Personally, I think indies should do whatever they can to stay in business, because they're getting screwed by publishers who offer bigger discounts to chains and big boxes.

But even though you'd think an indie would embrace a local author and handsell signed copies like crazy, I've found the chains seem to enjoy doing this more. Not at a corporate level. But at a personal level. And I think I know the reason why.

Often, people work at chain stores because they really love books. They don't give a rat's ass about coop or profit. They aren't worried about the store surving another month. If they like an author, he gets face out shelf space. He gets recommended to customers.

A motivated bookseller can override instructions from the head office to return stock. A motivated bookseller can order more copies even though the computer tells her not to. And since there is no risk, and since they love books to begin with, they often do. I've spied on many a chain computer that said it was time for my books to be stripped, when instead more are ordered by my friend, the bookseller.

The result? A self-fulfilling prophecy. In Barnes and Noble, because so many booksellers didn't return copies when they should have, those copies sold. This led to an increase in sales, and now the BN computer "models" my first two paperbacks —it automatically restocks when one is sold.

In a smaller indie, the employees or owner may not have that luxury to order extra copies, because money and space are so tight. So this indie I visited might have want to have me do an official signing, because they'll make a profit, but won't want to carry signed stock because they don't do well selling signed stock, as I'd witnessed by looking at my peers.

But again, how doers this figure into an author's overall sales and success?

No one thing leads to success. Publishing is an unreproduceable phenomenon, and no one can agree on why some books fail and some succeed when many of the same things were done to promote both books.

Ultimately, word of mouth makes an author big. The publisher, the bookseller, the reader, and the author, can all help to spread word of mouth.

Sometimes, booksellers can embrace a book and handsell it like crazy.

Sometimes, publishers can generate a buzz, spend a lot of money, and get the book a lot of media and publicity.

Sometimes, readers discover an author and begin telling each other about her, driving demand.

But the author plays a part in this. Maybe an author doesn't have the power to turn a book into a bestseller, but that doesn't mean the author should sit on his ass.

It's your name on the spine. This is your business. Your brand. You're CEO of your own company. You want to let the success of your brand rest entirely with other people? Especially within a poorly run system?

Booksellers have no financial incentive to sell specific books —especially since they can return unsold copies for credit. Plus, many of the chains now make more money selling non-book items.

Publishers waste huge amounts of money on things that don't work, and print millions of books that don't sell. One out of five books makes a profit. Very few go into a second printing.

Readers have many more options of entertainment available to them than the written word. Why spend $25 on a book you only read once when you can buy three DVDs for that price? Or buy a video game that will give you 50 hours of entertainment instead of the ten it takes to read a novel? Or surf cable TV or the Internet for free?

Yet more books are being published every year. More copies, for less readers

In order to compete, in order to survive, it is in our best interests to do all that we can to help spread that word of mouth.

Every time I do any sort of promotion, my goals are modest; to meet some people and sell a few books. And just about everything I do meets those goals.

If I start thinking "I have to do this to hit the bestseller list" or "I have to do this so I get another contract" then my expectations would be too high, because those things aren't within my control.

The only thing within my control is meeting people and selling some books. That might not be enough for my publisher, but that isn't my fault. I can't control what they do, or what they think. I can't make up for their mistakes or shortcomings.

All I can do is try my best.

How the world reacts to my efforts isn't within my power. But how I react to my efforts is within my power.

More on Drop-Ins

So, I've started again.

After about seven months off (aside from a few isolated instances) I've once again climbed into the RustyMobile to drop in bookstores and sign stock/schmooze booksellers.

There are those who question the cost effectiveness of doing drop-ins, both in terms of time and money.

Those people are wrong.

I went to seven bookstores yesterday, all of which I'd visited last year, and had the same basic experience at all of them.

1. No store had less than 15 of my books. Some had more than 30. Even though none of them expected me to show up, or knew I was coming.

2. The booksellers knew who I was, even if they hadn't met me. I always wondered about this. When I visit a store, I only meet a small portion of the people working there. But booksellers tell other booksellers that an author dropped in, so I shook hands with folks who I'd never met before who knew I visited last year, and knew about my books.

3. The free books my publisher sent them were received and appreciated. As far as promotions go, nothing beats a free books.

4. Many stores ordered more books before I left. In a few cases, they were out of one of my early titles, but my visit prompted them to order more. I also found out that I was on the "automatic re-order" list for several of the stores.

Over the next few weeks, I'll be visiting stores in most of Northern Illinois, southern Wisconsin, southern Michigan, and parts of Indiana. I've got about 150 lined up.

In the meantime, if you're looking for signed JA Konrath books and you can't make my Chuck E. Cheese Book Luanch Party on July 26, visit one of these fine establishements:

Poisoned Pen, Phoenix AZ, Borders, Schaumburg IL, Barnes & Noble, Schaumburg IL, Waldenbooks, Bloomingdale IL, Brain Snacks, Downer's Grove IL, Barnes & Noble, Bloomingdale IL, Borders, Wheaton IL, Barnes & Noble, Wheaton IL, Borders, St. Charles IL, Barnes & Noble, Geneva IL, Borders, Geneva IL

Now, back to the road...

9 comments

Calling the Guinness Folks...

Advance Reading Copies of RUSTY NAIL will be coming out next month. Bound into the front of each book will be a letter from me:

— —

To my Friends in the bookselling biz—

Lt. Jack Daniels and I want to thank you for kicking so much butt selling WHISKEY SOUR and BLOODY MARY. Your enthusiasm has been the key to the series' success.

For this book, Hyperion and I are doing something special—something never done before—to show our appreciation.

During the summer of 2006, I'll be visiting 500 bookstores across the United States.
I'd love to stop by your store and say hello.

If you're interested in having me drop in, please contact me through my website, JAKonrath.com.

I'm looking forward to seeing many of you again, and to meeting many of you for the first time. Now I'll open the floor to questions.

Q: Did you really say five-hundred bookstores?

Yes. I wish it could be more—there are so many great stores and great people in this business.

Q: How long will you be on the road?

All of July and August.

Q: Do we find out what happens to Jack's mother in this book?

Yes. Many characters from WHISKEY SOUR also return, like Phin and the Feebies. Plus, it appears that the Gingerbread Man is back.

Q: But I thought…

Shhh. Don't spoil it for new readers.

Q: So if I want you to drop by my store, I just have to email you?

I'll try my best to honor all requests. I love booksellers. That's why I thank so many of them in my acknowledgements. In fact, two of the main characters in RUSTY NAIL are named after booksellers.

Anyone who sells twenty or more copies of my novels gets mentioned in DIRTY MARTINI, the fourth Jack Daniels novel. The one who sells the most will get to be the villain in FUZZY NAVEL.

Q: What does "JA" stand for? Are you a woman or a man?
I'm sorry, no more questions. See you this summer!

All best,

JA Konrath

— —-

Is 500 stores in 61 days really doable? That's only about 8 stores a day. In densely populated areas, I can hit 15 a day. In rural areas, I can visit at least 5. These are drop-ins, not full-fledged events. Half hour schmoozing, then on to the next.

I see three main problems ont he horizon.

1. Planning. Even wiyh my trusty GPS, I've got to have a route planned. That could take some time.

2. Travel. The US is big. Real big. And there are long unpopulated stretches that would interfere with my quota.

3. I may die of exhaustion.

In July, I visited 106 bookstores in 11 days. I could have done more, bcause 8 of those were events that lasted several hours. But I probably could not have been more tired.

So can I do it? Is it even possible? Will my family forgive me for being gone an entire summer? Will it generate some buzz and publicity? Will it sell books?

The future will reveal all.

27 comments

Rusty Nail 500 Tour Info

I've finally compiled the list of bookstores I'm hoping to drop in on the Rusty Nail 500 tour. There are actually over 700 stores listed, because I'm an optimist. :)

For information, visit **www.JAKonrath.com** and click on the banner.

The tour begins June 29, at **Thrillerfest** in Phoenix. I'll return from Arizona on July 3, and hit the road July 4th, to return sometime in September.

Here's a rough schedule:

July 5 — Indianapolis, Indiana
July 6 — Cincinnati, Ohio
July 7-8 — Charleston, West Virginia
July 9-10 — Atlanta, Georgia
July 11 — Nashville, Tennessee
July 12 — Peoria, Illinois
July 13-14 — Madison, Wisconsin
July 15 — Fort Wayne, Indiana & Toledo, Ohio
July 16 — Cleveland, Ohio
July 17 — Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
July 18-19 — Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
July 20-24 — New York, New York
July 25-26 — Connecticut & Rhode ISland
July 27-28 — Boston, Massachusetts
July 29 — Albany, New York
July 30-31 — New Jersey
August 1 — Delaware, Washington DC
August 2 — Maryland
August 3 — Richmond, Virginia
August 4 — Raleigh, North Carolina
August 5 — Columbia, South Carolina
August 6 — Savannah, Georgia
August 7 — Jacksonville, Florida
August 8 — Daytona Beach, Florida
August 9 — Orlando, Florida
August 10 — Tampa Florida
August 11-12 — Miami, Florida
August 13-14 — San Diego, California
August 15 — San Bernadino, California
August 16-17 — Los Angeles, California.
August 18-19 — San Francisco, California
August 20 — Sacremento, California

August 21 - 31 — Chicago, Illinois & suburbs.
Sept 1 — Milwaukee, Wisconsin

You can download my full itinerary **HERE**.

If you are a writer, a fan, or just a helpful person who lives in or near one of the above locations, and want to buy a weary traveler a burger, or a beer, or let him spend the night in your spare bedroom or on your sofa, **email me**.

In return you'll get free books and characters named after you in my upcoming novels. You'll also get great conversation, something to talk about for years to come, and my eternal thanks.

Beginning tomorrow, I will have daily updates about the tour on this blog, to let people know where I've been, where I'm heading, and how everything is going.

Please help spread the word throughout the blogosphere and the Internet! I hope to see many of you on the road!

Adios!

33 comments

The Tour: Day 1, 2, and 3

The past few days have been spent in Phoenix for Thrillerfest. It was a great convention, but I missed much of it, having signed at 25 stores in the area.

At **The Poisoned Pen** I signed 80 hardcover (hc) copies of RUSTY NAIL, and five BLOODY MARY paperbacks (pb). If you live in or near Phoenix, please visit the Phoenix or Scottsdale Poisoned Pen stores for your Rusty Nail needs.

I did most of the following drop-ins with fellow scribe **Barry Eisler**, so if you're looking for signed copies of my books you'll likely find his available as well:

BN on 4847 East Ray, Phoenix - 7 pb

Borders 870 54th, Chandler - 4 pb

BN 311 W. Chandler Blvd, Chandler - 6 pb

Changing Hands 6428 S. McClintock, Tempe - 5 pb

Borders 1361 S. Alma, Mesa - 2 pb

Waldenbooks 1445 W. Southern, Mesa - 9 pb

Borders 699 South Mill, Tempe - 3 pb

Borders Biltmore Fashion Par, Phoenix - 9 pb (sold 1)

Bookstar 2073 E. Camelback, Phoenix - 4 pb (sold 1)

Borders 4555 E. Cactus, Phoenix - 5 pb (sold 1)

BN 21001 N. Tatum, Phoenix - 4 pb

Borders 700 E. Mayo, Phoenix - 4 pb

BN 7030 E. Greenway Parkway - 2 pb (sold 1)

BN 10500 N. 90th. Scottsdale - 7 pb

Bookstar 8919 E. Indian Bend - 6 pb

Borders 7135 E. Camelback, Scottsdale - 7 pb

Brentanos 7014 E. Camelback, Scottsdale - 5 pb (sold 2)

Waldenbooks 1445 W. Southern, Mesa - 5 pb

Waldenbooks 9631 N. Metro Parkway, Phoenix - 4 pb

Waldenbooks 302 East Bell, Phoenix - 7 pb
Borders 6555 E. Southern, Mesa - 5 pb (sold 1)

Borders Skyway Harbor Airport, Terminal 4 - 7 pb

Mysterious Galaxy (at the convention) 15 hc (sold out)

The Well Red Coyote 3190 W. Highway 89A, Sedona (at the convention) 7 pb (sold 5)

I also signed copies of **THRILLER** at a Walmart in Phoenix, but that doesn't count because they didn't have copies of my books.

Incidentally, I've been getting some good reviews for EPITAPH, my Phin Troutt story in the Thriller antho, and so has one of my favorite authors, F. Paul Wilson, who has a Repairman Jack story in the same book. I think this is wonderfully ironic —I read the first Repairman Jack book (The Tomb) when I was 14 years old and loved it. Repairman Jack is so named because he 'fixes' peoples problems. I fell in love with the character.

Eight years later, I wrote my first novel, an unpublished hardboiled tale called DEAD ON MY FEET. My protagonist was Phineas Troutt, a Chicago tough guy dying of cancer. Because of his situation, he'll take any dirty job for cash, which he then blows on drugs and hookers to help diffuse the pain of his lingering death. Phin calls himself a 'problem solver' which is a subtle homage (aka rip-off) of Paul's Repairman Jack character.

I never sold DOMY (publishers didn't think I could continue a series with a dying hero) but Phin pops up in my Jack Daniels series and plays major roles in WHISKEY SOUR and RUSTY NAIL. Phin has also been in Ellery Queen a few times.

I think its pretty damn cool that Phin now shares a cover with his literary inspiration, Repairman Jack. It gives me a fuzzy, warm feeling.

Thrillerfest recaps are being done on other blogs, so I won't go into any more detail other than to say it was a resounding success, I touched base with hundreds of authors and fans, and owe a lot of people beer.

Before leaving for Thrillerfest, I signed 15 copies of RUSTY NAIL at the Woodfield Mall Waldenbooks in Schaumburg. I also signed about 20 copies each of Bloody Mary and Whiskey Sour, hardcovers and paperbacks, so if you're in Illinois and need an autographed book of mine, that's the place to go until I return in September.

The BN in Schaumburg on Golf Road, and the Borders in Schaumburg on Golf Road, each have 30 signed copies of Bloody Mary.

Totals so far:

28 bookstores visited
339 books signed
472 bookstores to go

Which brings us to the driving protion of the Rusty Nail 500, which kicks off tomorrow in Indiana.

How does one prepare for a 60 day road trip? What am I bringing along?

Here's the lowdown:

- A GPS to help navigate
- A laptop to keep up with my blog and email
- A radar detector
- 480 copies of RUSTY NAIL
- 15,000 drink coasters
- 5000 business cards
- 500 copies of Crimespree Magazine
- 500 flyers
- 500 Audiobook postcards
- A lined notebook
- The itinerary
- Clothes, a toothbrush, and deodorant

While the GPS, laptop, and radar detector are obvious, the other items require some explanation.

My publisher generously donated 500 copies of the new hardcover to give to bookstores. I used 20 of them in Phoenix, to great success. After I sign stock at a store, I give the most enthusiastic employee a signed copy of the new book. Sometimes this is the manager, or CRM, but often it is the person who stocks the mysteries, or really loves to read, or got really excited that I showed up.

That person also gets a special **Bleak House** edition of **Crime Spree**, which has info about my upcoming antho THESE GUNS FOR HIRE (which also features a new Phin Troutt story), a flyer and interview left over from my library mailing with Julia Spencer-Fleming, and a postcard about my audiobooks.

Each book I sign gets a business card placed inside, showing the covers of the other books in my series.

Each person I meet in the store (fans and employees) gets a signed drink coaster. I don't spend more than 15-20 minutes in a store, but if fans are around I'll try to sell a book or two, which worked several times in Phoenix.

The notebook is what I call the de*al sealer*. I tell all the booksellers I meet that I love to thank people in the acknowledgements section of my books, and if they sell the heck out my my series and order more, I'll thank them in DIRTY MARTINI coming next year. They write down their names, I devote a few pages in the new book to thanking them, and we all win.

From this point on, I'll do daily updates whenever possible. If you've emailed me because you'd like to meet me or help out, I'll answer your email sometime today.

Now let's get this party started...

16 comments

Tour Day 4

I'm in Indianapolis, and under some time constraints so this will be a quickie blog entry.

Miles driven today: 287
Bookstores visited: 14
Books signed: 94
Books hand sold: 5
Bookstores remaining: 458

If you're looking for signed copies of RUSTY NAIL in the heartland, visit **The Mystery Company** in Carmel.

You can also find signed copies at:

Waldenbooks 3919 Lafayette, Indianapoils

Waldenbooks 6020 E. 82 Indianapolis

Borders 11 S. Meridian Indianapolis

Borders 8675 River Crossinf Blvd Indianapolis

Borders 5612 Castleton Corner Indianapolis

Borders 2381 Pointe Parkway Carmel

Barnes & Nobel 3748 E, 82nd St Indianapolis

BN 14709 US Hwy 31 North Carmel

BN 17090 Mercantile Blvd Noblesville

Borders 348 State Lafayette

BN 2323 Sagamore Lafayette

Waldenbooks Lafayette

I was assisted today by the stalwart Sean Hicks, who drove me to several stores, and the intrepid Moni Draper, who offered me her lovely guest room to sleep in. Thanks, folks!

On to Cincinnati...

7 comments

Tour Day 5, 6, and 7

Day 5

Miles driven today: 395
Bookstores visited: 19
Books signed: 95
Books hand sold: 2
Bookstores remaining: 439

I'm tired, but happy with the way things are going.

With the help of the talented **James R. Winter**, who carted me around Cincinnati all day, we managed to sign at 18 bookstores, which is really impressive considering how far apart some of them are. Jim's a great guy and a great writer —-visit him on his blog and get your hands on a copy of his mystery novel Northcoast Shakedown.

It took a solid 11 hours to finish up in Ohio, and then I managed to make it to Lexington, KY to sign at one final bookstore (Joseph Beth) and hang out with the editor of the best science fiction magazine being currently published, **Apex**. Jason kindly invited me to stay in his lovely home for the night, and I ate all of his food and made a really sweet fort out of sofa cushions which I hope he'll leave standing after I move on.

I'm not an idiot (I'm also not an actor, but I play one on TV) and it's obvious that so far on this tour that a lot of people are chipping in to help me out. Three nights on the road, and I've already had three free meals, two places to crash for free, and two author escorts who drove me around their towns. I'm both humbled and blown away by all of this generosity. In Carmel, a fan who heard about my tour even gave me a $25 gas card. Are people awesome, or what?

Not everything is gooing 100% smooth, however. The chain of B. Dalton (which is the smaller, mall friendly version on Barnes and Noble) doesn't seem to carry my books. I've visited three so far, and struck out each time. Of course, the main reason I'm going to these bookstores is to meet the booksellers, and hopefully they will carry my books after meeting me, so progress is being made.

Also, the wonderful Waldenbooks chain has a computer problem where my newest novel is listed in their system as a paperback for release in 2007. Since the hardcover is available right now, this makes ordering my latest impossible at these stores, which can't be helping my sales. I've spoken to several higher ups, and hopefully this will get resolved. If you want to buy my book through Walden, suggest they shortlist it or special order it through a distributor (Ingram, Partners, etc).

If you're looking for signed books in the area, here are the stores I visited:

Waldenbooks 7875 Montgomery, Cincinnati

Brentanos 28 West Fourth St. Cincinnati

Waldenbooks 6139 Glenway Ave. Cincinatti

Waldenbooks 4601-672 Eastgate Blvd. Cincinnati

Joseph Beth 2692 Madison Road Cincinnati

BN 7800 Montgomery Cincinatti

Borders 11711 Princeton Pike Cincinnati
Borders 4530 Eastgate Cincinnati

Borders 9459 Colerain Cincinnati

Borders 2785 Dixie Hgwy Crestview Hills KY

Borders 5105 Deerfield Blvd Mason OH

BN 1 Levee Way Newport KY

BN 7663 Mall Road Florence KY

BN 9455 Civic Center Blvd West Chest OH

BN 9891 Waterstone blvd Cincinnati

Waldenbooks Florence KY

Joseph Beth Lexington KY

I also visited B. Dalton at the Cincinnati Northgate mall and the Tri County Mall, and they promised to order some copies.

Day 6

Miles driven today: 285
Bookstores visited: 3
Books hand sold: 2
Bookstores remaining: 436

My friend, thriller author **Robert W. Walker**, is getting married, and he asked me to be his best man. Rob lives in Charleston, West Virginia. I love Charleston, but it doesn't have many bookstores. In between the wedding rehearsal and the long travel times, I managed to squeeze in four bookstore visits.

Taylor Books226 Capitol St Charleston

Waldenbooks 2107 Charleston Town Center

Waldenbooks 175 Kanawha Mall

Waldenbooks 500 Winchester Ave Ashland KY

While the momentum I've been building up on this tour has come to a screeching halt, it's great to be here for Rob.

Day 7

Today is Rob's wedding, and I'll be doing best man duties. I had a solid eight hours of sleep for the first time in about ten days, which felt great.

I have two free hours this morning, so I hit a nearby Kinko's to catch up on my email and blog, and to finish the line edit of DIRTY MARTINI, which is due in a few days.

After the reception tonight, I'm, heading for Knoxville TN. I'll be signing at Knoxville stores tomorrow, and then on to Atlanta.

On Monday, July 10, some friends are throwing a booklaunch party for me in Atlanta. If you'd like to attend, RSVP Linda Darter at ldarter@csfmail.org. It's on Pelham Road, being held between 6pm and 8pm. Hope to see some of you there!

8 comments

Tour Day 8 and 9

Day 8

Miles driven today: 324
Bookstores visited: 0
Books signed: 0
Books hand sold: 0
Bookstores remaining: 439

So far, the hardest thing about this tour has been finding time to blog about it.

I finished the line edit of DIRTY MARTINI and sent it off to Hyperion, then attended Rob's wedding and reception, and immediately afterward drove from Charleston WV to Knoxville TN, which was a lovely five and a half hour trip through mountains with zero cell phone and radio reception.

There wasn't any time to visit bookstores today, which plays havoc with my daily average, but I'll make up for it tomorrow.

Day 9

Miles driven today: 283
Bookstores visited: 13
Books signed: 70
Books hand sold: 4
Bookstores remaining: 426

Signed at the following stores in Tennessee:

Borders 202 Morrell Road Knoxville

Borders 11235 Parkside Dr. Knoxville

Books-A-Million (BAM) 8507 Kingston Pike4 Knoxville

BAM 190 Collier Dr. Pigeon Forge

Waldenbooks 3000 MAll Roasd North Knoxville

BN 8029 Kingston Pike Knoxville

BAM Chattanooga

Waldenbooks Chattanooga

BN Chatanooga

Then on to Atlanta:

BN 292 Cobb Parkway

BN 50 Barrett Parkway Marietta

Borders 3101 Cobb Parkway

BN Cobb Parkway Marietta

Atlanta has about 20 more stores, and I hope to hit many of them before my book party.

So far on tour, I've given away 76 copies of Rusty Nail to booksellers, and their response has been overwhelmingly positive. The free book goes to the person in the store most likely to read it (the biggest thriller fan, the mystery department head, the GM, the CRM, the person who recognizes me or has read me before.)

As I mentioned before, the goal here isn't just to sign stock. In fact, I have several goals when I walk into a bookstore:

- Sign stock and place business cards in the books I sign. The cards stick out like bookmarks, which draws more attention to the book and also advertises the other books in the series.
- Meet the booksellers and give them signed coasters to put in future books of mine that they order (which sort of makes them signed copies.)
- Tell the booksellers about my series, and give them a free copy of Rusty Nail, which also comes with promo material for my audiobooks and These Guns for Hire, my antho coming out in the fall.
- Get business cards with email addys for follow ups.
- Have booksellers write their names in my acknowledgements book, and let them know they'll see their name in print when Dirty Martini comes out next year.
- Ask them to please handsell the copies I've signed, and then order more.

I'm surprised how many stores have copies of all three books, which means my backlist is being stocked (a good thing.) However, almost half of the stores I've visited haven't gotten their copies of Rusty Nail yet, or tell me they have tried to get it and Whiskey Sour, but can't because of distributor/computer issues. Hopefully that is being resolved (Whiskey Sour is coming out in a second printing, and the Rusty Nail issue is being fixed.) We'll see how things develop as the weeks pass.

8 comments

Internet Happenings

Before I resume with the semi-daily tour update, I'd like to mention a few cool things happening on the information superhighway.

The multi-talented **MJ Rose** has come up with an innovative way to spread the word about her third Dr. Morgan Snow book, **The Venus Fix**. The first two in the series, **The Halo Effect** and **The Delilah Complex** were terrific thrillers, nicely combining hot and steamy sex with hair raising thrills. Go out and buy many copies of each.

To support the new book, MJ is touring the blogosphere much like I'm touring the country, which is a smart and innovative idea.

T**he Goal**: to get 500 blogs to write about THE VENUS FIX and link to the Vidlit or an Interview with me about it. MJ will donate $5 to a charity that the bloggers themselves chose for each link.

All the rules are here at Myspace. Go and check them out, right now. I'll still be here when you get back.

Upon hearing about her tour, it made perfect sense to turn this into a friendly competition to see who reaches 500 first. Here's the official press release:

TWO ROADS DIVERGE

J**.A. Konrath and M.J. Rose both have both taken to the highway to help their publishers market their books.**

J.A. Konrath (RUSTY NAIL 7/1) is driving across the country on the concrete highway with the goal of hitting 500 bookstores by the end of the Aug.

M.J. Rose (THE VENUS FIX 7/1) driving across country on the virtual highway with the goal of reaching 500 blogs by the end of Aug.

Konrath has his car, toothbrush, deodorant, and a GPS device and is planning to stop in every bookstore he can find.

Rose has a fund raising effort, an information page up at myspace where bloggers can learn about the contest and four video clips including a Vidlit, Author Interview and BookGroup video discussion.

Rather than "may the better author win" Â– "may they both win."

Besides donating $5 for every blog and bookseller who gets involved in MJ's effort via the info at Myspace.com, she will also link back them on a special page at my website and mention them in the acknowledgements of her next book.

So you're helping two worthy causes (a charity and MJ Rose, who is tireless in her efforts to help other writers learn about promotion).

If you want to be counted be sure you read the instructions at MySpace.com and then send a permalink to venusfix@gmail.com. Every blogger who participates will also be entered in a weekly drawing for a signed, personalized copy of THE VENUS FIX!

I'd be delighted if everyone who reads this blog not only links to MJ, but helps to spread the word about her efforts.

I'd also like to raise the stakes. A friendly competition is fine, but I think that there should be more to win than simple bragging rights. So I'm throwing down the gauntlet.

Bouchercon is in Madison, Wisconsin this year. I think the loser should throw a room party, complete with champagne and cake, in the winner's honor. Naturally, everyone will be invited.

Are you up for it, MJ? I know a great bakery in Madison where you could buy a lovely cake decorated with the cover of RUSTY NAIL. Also, for your future reference, I prefer Asti Spumante to champagne...

In other blog news, several friends of mine have recently started a new blog called **The Outfit**. This Chicago based mystery blog combines the talents of Sean Chercover, Barbara D'Amato, Michael Allen Dymmoch, Kevin Guilfoile, Libby Hellmann, Sara Paretsky, and Marcus Sakey. I encourage everyone to check it out and link to it.

I'm running late today, and have to get from Nashville to Peoria by 4pm, so I can't do a full tour update until later, but here are the current stats:

Miles driven so far: 2276
Bookstores visited so far: 94
Books signed so far: 590
Books hand sold so far: 69
Bookstores remaining: 406

If all goes well, I'll visit my 100th bookstore today. A

And now, back to the road...

11 comments

Tour Day 10, 11, 12, and 13

Day 10

I hit Atlanta, signing at 11 bookstores and attending a book party hosted by my friends Linda Darter and Jim Coursey. Several fans of mine showed up to have me sign their books, which never ceases to amaze me. I'm tickled any time anyone wants me to sign a book, and if they actually hunt me down to get a signature, I'm truly humbled.

One of the high points of the tour so far was meeting bookseller Paul Pessolano at the Borders in Snellville Georgia. Paul confided that he'd hand sold over 150 copies of Whiskey Sour, and surprised me by having 68 copies of Rusty Nail on hand for me to sign.

Paul will have a character named after him in an upcoming book. I may also name a child after him as well.

The stores I visited include:

B. Dalton Peachtree Center

BN 2900 Peachtree Road

BN 2852 Cobb Pkwy

BN 120 Perimter Center

BN 5141 Peachtree Parkway

BN 50 Barrett Pkwy

Borders 650 Ponce de Leon

Borders 1745 Peachtree

Borders 3637 Peachtree

Borders 3101 Cobb Pkwy

Borders 4745 Ashford Dunwoody

Borders East Cobb Marietta

Waldenbooks 3393 Peachtree

Chapter 11 220 Johnson Ferry Sandy Springs

If you live in the area and missed me passing through, please visit one of the above stores for your autographed JA Konrath needs.

Day 11

I got up early to get to Nashville, and managed to hit 10 bookstores during the drive. The lovely and talented **Tasha Alexander** played tour guide and took me around to of these, including Davis-Kidd where I ran into the lovely and talented **JT Ellison**, who also bought me dinner. JT, as you should know, is one of the gurus behind **Killer Year**, a blog that has been getting a lot of well deserved press lately. JA says: link to them.

Tasha then took southern hospitality up to the next level by offering to let me stay in her lovely home. I owe her and her husband big thanks. Buy her historical mystery **And Only to Deceive**, then buy copies for everyone you know. I really don't care for historicals, but this one I loved.

Other talented and lovely people I got to hang out with in TN were mystery author **Chris Well**, his wife **Erica Well**, and SinC Chapter Prez **JB Thompson**. I also had a chance to give a short speech to the Sisters in Crime group, as I am also a proud sister.
Stores I visited include:

Davis-Kidd 2121 Green Hills Village Dr, Nashville

Waldenbooks 1800 Galleria, Franklin

BN 1701 Cool Springs, Brentwood

Borders 2501 Westend, Nashville

Borders 330 Franklin, Brentwood

Waldenbooks Kenneson GA

Books-a-Million Hixson TN

Waldenbooks Hixson TN

BAM Murfeesboro TN

Day 12

I was in the car a whopping 14 hours today, and managed to drop by ten stores along a circuitous 600 mile route from Nashville to my home in Schaumburg, IL. Stores include:

BAM Clarksville TN

Borders Clarksville TN

Borders Champaign IL

BN Champaign IL

Waldenbooks Champaign IL

BN Bloomington IL

Borders Normal IL

Borders Peoria IL

Waldenbooks Peoria IL

BN Peoria IL

By the end of it I was pretty wiped out, and managed to get five hours of sleep before heading to Madison in the morning.

Day 13

I'm here today the the University of Madison Writer's Insitute doing some lectures on —what else — writing and marketing. After I got into town this morning, I taught a class on creating salable series characters, then managed to visit four are bookstores:

Borders 3759 University Dr

Borders 2173 Zeier Rd

BN East Towne Mall

BN West Towne Mall

I'll be back to the conference for a group signing at 5pm, and used the small amount of free time I had to write this blog entry.

TOTALS:

Miles driven so far: 2713
Bookstores visited so far: 108
Books signed so far: 705
Books hand sold so far: 70
Bookstores remaining: 392

TOUR THOUGHTS:

So far, so good. While there don't seem to be enough hours in the day to catch up on my email (or my sleep) I'm already starting to see some positive results of this tour. I'm asking booksellers to order more copies of my titles, and they seem to be responding (at least, according to my Ingram numbers). Many folks appear to be very happy to meet me, and I'm happy to meet them as well.

I'm also seeing some fans on the road, and a lot of folks are helping me out in many different ways, from food to lodging to touring advice and tips to simply wishing me luck.

As far as bang for the promotional buck goes, and can't think of anything I've done that has been as effective as this tour, and I'm only 1/5 done with it.

This next leg of the tour takes me through New York and the **Backspace Conference,** where I'm doing MC duties, but after the Big Apple my schedule will be a lot less hectic, and I should be able to slow down my pace a bit.

Tomorrow (July 14) I'll be signing at **Booked for Murder** in Madison around 4pm and **Books and Company** in Oconomowoc around 6pm. On July 15 at 7:30pm I'll be at **Foul Play Books** in Ohio. Hope to see some of you there!

7 comments

Tour Day 14

Have to be really fast here, because I need to hit the highway.

Miles driven so far: 3086
Bookstores visited so far: 111
Books signed so far: 827
Books hand sold so far: 97
Bookstores remaining: 389

Now I'm off to Indiana and Ohio...

6 comments

Tour Day 15

Miles driven so far: 3510
Bookstores visited so far: 120
Books signed so far: 938
Books hand sold so far: 113
Bookstores remaining: 380

I burned through Indiana, then down into Westerville Ohio where the patient patrons of Foul Play Books waited for me, even though I was an hour and a half late (that darn Eastern/Central time zone change.)

Stores I signed at include:

Waldenbooks Madison

Booked For Murder Madison

Books and Company Oconomowoc

Walden Calumet City IL

Borders Highland IN

BN South Bend IN

Borders South Bend IN

Borders Fort Wayne IN

BN Fort Wayne IN

Waldenbooks Fort Wayne IN

Waldenbooks Lima OH

Foul Play Westerville OH

If you're looking for signed JA Konrath books, look to the above stores.

TALES FROM THE ROAD

I haven't been posting much in the way of commentary about the tour so far, because I've been crunched for time. Here are a few of the things I've been meaning to share:

- This tour has been made more difficult by having scheduled events. Next time, I won't do any events at all, and I won't be nearly as rushed to get from point A to point B, which will be more relaxing and more thorough. I only have a few scheduled events left (the Backspace Conference in NY, lunches

with my agent and editor) and then will be easier.

- While visiting a chain, I saw a self-published guy sitting behind a pile of his books in the middle of the store. When I walked past, he didn't acknowledge me. After meeting all of the employees and getting them fired up about my books, I went back to this dejected writer and gave him my two cents. He needed to get out from behind the chair, talk to staff, talk to customers, and handsell his books. I told him I've done many signings, and sitting ther elike a lump wasn't going to help his sales. He told me that he'd been doing this for years and was doing just fine. Not once did he tell me about his books — had he done so, I would have bought one. Nor did he tell the many people who passed his table about his books. Thanks for reminding me to stay focused, my self-pubbed friend.

- On two occasions, employees bought my entire stock of books in their store, between six and eight copies. I'm always delighted when this happens, because the best way to get people to handsell you is to have them read you. The free copies of RUSTY NAIL my publisher suplied me with to give away are a huge hit, and will go a long way to helping keep my books in stock. On a few dozen occasions, I watched managers order more of my books, so the signed coasters I pass out will have a home and make these copies "signed by author."

- In Champaign IL, I got hammered by rain. It was so bad, cars were pulled over alongside the road because their windshield wipers couldn't keep up. Barry Eisler recommended Rain-X, which repels water (and exploding flying beetles.) It works like a wonder. All drivers need this stuff.

- A few days into the tour, my car (a '96 Suzuki Sidekick I've dubbed The Rustymobile) sprung a leak. The water condensation from the air conditioning, which should drip outside the car, began to drip inside the car on the passenger side by the floor mat. I stuck a picnic cooler under the leak, and the cold water now keeps my cans of energy drink nice and cool without having to stop for ice all the time. Lemons and lemonade...

- One several occasions, I was blown away by how many copies of my books a store had. I'm averaging between 6 and 10 per store, but several times I've been in the mid double digits. The last time it happened was in Highland. When I pulled up to the store (which wasn't scheduled on my tour but was a store of opportunity that my GPS found for me) I realized it looked familiar. Last year, I'd done a reading/speech there for a local writing group. They had invited me, and I'd driven the two+ hours there to address a handful of people. At the time, I'd wondered why I kept doing those small events — they didn't seem worth my time or gas money. But when I arrived in Highland yesterday, the manager remembered me from my previous visit, and had thirty copies of my books waiting for me to sign. Considering he hadn't expected me to drop by, I was stunned. Those little events aren't so little after all.

- I still haven't seen any copies of Rusty Nail at any Waldenbooks stores, and their computers still don't allow them to order it. But this isn't cramping my style at all. I explain the situation to the managers, and they either order copies through another distributor, or hold on to my coasters for when the copies eventually arrive —and they will eventually arrive. In a way, this staggered release date will keep my

books on the shelf even longer, and a longer shelf life is always good.

- I've begun calling B. Dalton prior to dropping in, and have yet to find one that carries my books. Granted, these mall stores are smaller than the Barnes and Noble stores (same company), but BN sells a lot of my books, and I'm wondering why they don't stock any copies. I like the B. Dalton stores, and hopefully they'll carry me in the future.

- If you're passing through Westerville Ohio, shoot yourself in the head before staying at the Knight's Inn. The condition of my room fell somewhere between squallor and destitution. There were stains of dubious origin on the carpet and drapes and walls, my bedsheets were holey and smelled like BO, the bathroom was without towels and had a showerhead situated at chest level (with the stream force of a small child urinating), and the 'wireless internet' only worked if I stood on a chair and help my laptop next to the window. And this was $50 a night. Sleeping in the Rustymobile would have been preferable...

- I'm doing pretty well handselling. I spend perhaps 15 minutes in each store, and the goal is to meet the booksellers. But if there are customers nearby, they also get a spiel, and it works at least 50% of the time. Not only does a quick sale make an impression on the buyer (who will hopefully tell all of her friends about the author she met in the bookstore) but the booksellers are always thrilled.

- My ring finger is itching as I write this. I think the Knight's Inn has given me yet another gift — — scabies.

And now, back to the road. On to Cleveland today, and Pittsburgh tomorrow.

17 comments

Tour Day 16 and 17

Quickie update today, because I have to get on the road.I never went to Cleveland (sorry to all who hoped I would) because I got hung up signing in bookstores around Columbus and then went straight to Pittsburgh. Today, on to Philly.

A special King-sized shout out to writer **Rebecca Drake**, whose debut thriller DON'T BE AFRAID will in fact make you very afraid. I thought I wrote creepy serial killers, but apparently I haven't cornered the market on them. Look for it this September, or pre-order it **HERE**. With Rebecca as my guide, we managed to visit 19 stores in Pittsburgh. She also boarded me for the night, putting up with my tragic 'nude sleepwalking' disorder. Apologies to her husband Joe when I tried to crawl into bed and spoon with him.

The following night I spent in the considerate care of fellow scribe **M. Stephen Lukac** who had beer and chicken ready for me when I pulled into his driveway late last night. This is truly a man after my own heart. Gracias, Steve. When you're in Chicago, mi casa tu casa. Check out Steve's website and **blog** —he's a great writer and a wealth of info about the publishing biz.

I'll blog in more depth about other people I met (hi **Susan** and Meryl!) and stores I visited when I get some free time.

Miles driven so far: 3998
Bookstores visited so far: 139
Books signed so far: 1119
Books hand sold so far: 132
Bookstores remaining: 361
Average hours of sleep per night: 5

Thanks to all who have contacted me showing support, and to those offering support. It means a lot. I don't think this tour would have been humanly possible without the help of you guys.

Now back to the trail...

12 comments

Tour Day 18 and 19

I've got to stop staying at cheap motels.

After a lovely stay in Philly last night, bunking with my buddy Jim Coursey in his deluxe Hampton Inn suite, I cruised into NY.

I did nine signings in PA (including one with Jim Munchel in Camp Hill who had 110 copies of my books) and spent the night hours drinking Yuengling lager with Mr. Coursey. The next morning, I headed to the Big Apple on four hours of sleep. After a wonderful lunch with Leslie Wells and her niece, I was so wiped out I had to take a nap.

In an effort to keep down costs I decided to stay in New Jersey, and my trusty GPS led me to the appropriately named Budget Inn in Elizabeth. While the Knight's Inn has this place beat in terms of squalor, this room should win some sort of award for worst odor. It smells like someone murdered a hooker on the bed. And after the murder, they smoked eight thousand cigarettes, while farting. Next hotel, I swear I'll get a room that costs more than fifty bucks.

I was asleep the moment my head hit the smelly limp thing the Inn's proprietors optimistically refer to as a pillow. I awoke in the early evening, and visited some stores in Staten Island and around Jersey. I'll post a complete list of stores tomorrow night (perhaps) but in the meantime here's the stats:

Miles driven so far: 4604
Bookstores visited so far: 156
Books signed so far: 1332
Books hand sold so far: 143
Bookstores remaining: 344
Nights in crappy hotels: 5

The **Backspace Conference** is happening this weekend, at the reknowned Algonquin Hotel in NYC. I'll be doing the toastmaster thing, and I believe I'm also on some sort of panel. Tomorrow I'm hitting Manhattan with my publicist and we're going to visit at least 15 stores. But now, the lumpy bed beckons...

16 comments

Tour Day 20, 21, and 22

The Backspace Conference is over, and by all accounts it was a success. If you're an aspiring writer, this is a must-attend event.

I got to spend some quality time with Barry Eisler, Lee Child, MJ Rose, Jeff Cohen, Heather Brewer, Jackie Kessler, Reed Farrel Coleman, David Robbins, Harry Hunsicker, and many other more important people that I'm forgetting due to fatigue.

I was honored to win the *Bob Kellogg Good Citizen Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Internet Writing Community*. Lesson to writers: help each other, and one day you'll get an award. Also helping each other happens to be a nice thing to do.

A few days ago my publicist, Charlie Davidson, carted me around New York for drop-in signings, but since then I haven't been able to do much in the way of bookstore visits, having emceed this convention. But that will change today, when Barry Eisler and I tool around town in the Rustymobile, picking up the bookstores I missed.

Thanks to everyone who has called or emailed, offering to help out. I've been extremely busy and unable to reply to email, but you'll be hearing from me soon.

Stats:

Miles driven so far: 5016
Bookstores visited so far: 174
Books signed so far: 1558
Books hand sold so far: 146
Bookstores remaining: 326
Awards won: 1

And for those who want to buy signed JA Konrath books in your local bookstore, here's where I've been lately:

Joseph Beth Pittsburgh PA

Mystery Lovers Bookshop Oakmont PA

Waldenbooks 1000 Ross Park Drive Pittsburgh

Waldenbooks 242 South Hills Village Mall Pittsburgh

Borders Express 100 Robinson Ctr Pittsburgh

BN 339 Sixth Ave Pittsburgh

BN Squirrel Hill Pittsburgh

BN Waterfront Homestead Pittsburgh

BN Waterworks Pittsburgh

BN South Hills Village Pittsburgh

BN 100 Quinn Drive Pittsburgh

BN Monroeville Pittsburgh

BN Cranberry Township PA

Borders North Hills Pittsburgh

Borders Monroeville PA

Borders The Mills Tarentam PA

Aspinwall Bookshop Pittsburgh

Walden Unionville PA

Borders 1 s. Bread Philadelphia PA

Borders Express 1625 Chestnut Philadelphia

BN 1805 Walnut Philadelphia

Jay's Bookstall Pittsburgh PA

Borders Camp Hill PA

Waldenbooks Camp Hill PA

Mechanicsburg Mystery Bookstore

BN Camp Hill PA

Walden York PA

Borders York PA

Walden Lancaster PA

Borders LAncaster PA

BN Lancaster PA

Borders East Brunswick New Jersey

BN East Brunswick NJ

BN Holmdel NJ

Black Orchid Bookshop NY

Mysterious Bookshop NY

Partners and Crime NY

Murder Ink NY

The Strand NY

Borders 461 Park Ave NY

Borders Columbus Circle NY

Borders Express Staten Island NY

BN Astor Place NY

BN Union Square NY

BN 555 Fifth Ave NY

BN 600 Fifth Ave NY

BN Lincoln Center NY

BN 2289 Broadway NY

BN 86th & 2nd NY

BN 86th & Lexington NY

BN Staten Island

Colliseum Books 42nd Street NY

After the Big Apple today, I'm heading to Connecticut.

Onward and upward...

17 comments

Tour Day 23, 24, 25

Miles driven so far: 5223
Bookstores visited so far: 216
Books signed so far: 2054
Books hand sold so far: 152
Bookstores remaining: 284
Gas: $596
Hotels: $588
Food: $225

Touring for Cheapskates

Before I get into the updated bookstore list, I'd like to share some tips for the author who is touring on a budget (which is everyone except for Evanovich.) My publisher is financing the majority of this tour, and the rest comes out of my pocket. The longer I can stretch a dollar, the longer I can stay on the road.

I can't over-emphasize the cost/benefit value of this tour so far. Meeting booksellers isn't just smart —it's essential. I've made some terrific contacts, and met many folks who will hand sell my books long after I'm gone. This is the single most effective thing I've done for my career.

Though I seriously doubt any other author is crazy enough to visit 500 stores, I urge you to do some kind of limited touring, if only in your immediate area. If you do decide to take your show on the road, there are a few tricks I've picked up to keep your costs waaaaay down.

1. Drive a car that has decent mileage. So far I've traveled 5100 miles and spent $596 on gas. My fuel cost per store visited is $2.75 —-or my royalty for selling a single hardcover. This price would go up considerably if I drove a guzzler.

2. Stay with friends or at hotels you don't have to pay for. I've been to two conference while on tour, and they paid for hotels, which meant that I could visit the bookstores in those towns for free. I've also stayed with many writers and fans while on tour (the lovely and talented **Karen E. Olson,** author of **Sacred Cows**, recently allowed me to crash in her beautiful home in Connecticut.) My hotel costs per store have averaged about $2.72.

3. Bring food, get free food. Don't spend $3 on a bottled water when you can buy a case for $12. The same goes for road snacks. Don't pay for coffee when all chain bookstores have coffee shops that will gladly offer you a free cup if you say to a manager, "I really love your coffee." Many cheap hotels have free breakfast buffets, and an extra bagel stuffed into your pocket really helps keep up the energy during long stretches on the road. Friends and fans on the road buying you food also helps. I've gone days without spending a cent on food.

4. Reservations. When you are forced to stay at a hotel, it's cheaper to make reservations online than simply checking in at the front desk. Most hotels have free Wifi internet access. Park in their lot, pull out the

laptop, visit Priceline.com or Expedia, and get a few bucks off before checking in.

5. If you're on the road for a while, you'll have to do laundry. If you can't use a friend's house to wash clothes, find a hotel that has a washer/dryer —it's cheaper and quicker than a laundrymat or dry cleaner. Don't have a laundry bag to haul clothes? Even the cheapest hotel has pillowcases. Hotel so cheap they don't have an iron? Hang your shirt in the bathroom and turn on the shower. Steam gets out most of the wrinkles.

So far, the cost per bookstore, with everything factored in, is roughly $6.50 each. Contrast that to an official signing, which can cost up to $2000 a store (and the author only sells 30 copies of their book.) Quite a bargain, ain't it?

The cost will go up when I visit the West coast (I'm flying to California and have to rent a car) but will go back down when I finally get home and hit the 100+ bookstores within driving distance of my home.

I should hit the halfway point within the next few days, and I'll be in Rhode Island and Massachusetts up through Saturday. And if you're looking for a signed book, visit one of these fine establishments:

Borders Wall Street NY

Borders 32nd & 2nd NY

BN Greenwich Village NY

BN 106 Court Brooklyn NY

BN 675 6th Ave NY

BN 105 5th Ave NY

BN Park Slope Brooklyn NY

BN 160 E. 54th NY

BN Forest Hills NY

BN Fresh Meadows NY

BN Bayside NY

Coliseum Books 42nd St NY

BN White Plains NY

BN Yonkers NY

BN Hartsdale NY

Borders White Plains NY

Walden Greenwich CT

Borders Scarsdale NY

Walden Ryebrook NY

Walden Stamford CT

Borders Stamford CT

BN Norwalf CT

Borders Wilton CT

Borders Danbury CT

Walden Danbury CT

BN Danbury CT

Borders Express Farmington CT

Borders Farmington CT

Borders Manchester CT

Borders Simsbury CT

BN Glastonbury CT

BN Farmington CT

BN Enfield CT

Walden Meriden CT

Walden Enfield CT

BN Orange CT

Borders Milford CT

BN Yale CT

BN North Haven CT

A few times on this tour I've visited bookstores that had no copies of my books. This is a good thing —after meeting me they order copies. But I'm not listing these stores on the blog for those keeping count. :)

Gotta go. I'm finding it tough to blog on the road, because I'm exhausted at the end of the day, but I'll try to keep updating every few days. Thanks to the many who are following my tour and are leaving words of encouragement either here or through email —every comment is appreciated!

13 comments

Tour Day 26 and 27

Miles driven so far: 5313
Bookstores visited so far: 235
Books signed so far: 2156
Books hand sold so far: 153
Bookstores remaining: 265
Drink coasters signed: 3400
Bookstore employees I've met: 442

Take a look at that last statistic. As I near the halfway point on this tour, I've met 442 booksellers. These are 442 people who have heard my pitch, seen my face, looked at my books, and shaken my hand. Many of them have also received a free copy of RUSTY NAIL.

I'm carrying around a journal which has all 442 names in it, and I've informed each of these booksellers that they will have their name listed in the acknowledgements of DIRTY MARTINI, coming out next year.

What's the value of this? Can you even put a value on it?

By the end of this tour, I'll have met roughly 1000 booksellers. Let's say that half of those booksellers quit, or get fired, or get jobs elsewhere. Of the 500 that are left, lets say half of those forgot about me ten seconds after I left. Of the 250 that are left, let's say that 4/5 of them didn't like me, or don't like mysteries, or don't like their jobs, or simply don't care.

That leaves 50 booksellers who really like me and my books and who are excited to handsell them.

A motivated bookseller can sell dozens, if not hundreds, of books. They'll put my books on end caps and in displays, on front tables even though there is no coop, and face out instead of spine out in the sections. They'll special order them, shortlist them, and jobber them in, even if their computer tells them they should only stock four. They'll recommend the books to customers, who will then become fans. Some of them will even stay in touch with me and become friends.

There are already a handful of booksellers who have each sold over a hundred copies of my books. If I can add 50 more to their ranks, that's an extra 5000 books sold a year. But it goes beyond that. If a stores sells a lot of copies, more copies are shipped to other stores in that area, anticipating the demand. More copies in a store means more shelf space, more face-outs, and more sales.

And 50 is actually a very low estimate. I've already met over 150 booksellers so far who were really excited to meet me and get a free book. I believe many of these folks will continue to sell my series, even if we never meet again.

Has this tour been effective? Hell yes. In fact, I think this tour is the smartest thing I've ever done for my career. I'm recruiting a nation-wide sales force. Normal book tours can't do that. Neither can advertising, marketing, or publicity. I truly believe that this is the future of book tours, whether you like it or not.

In other news, I'm currently in Boston, and had drinks last night with fellow writers **Jeremiah Healy** and **Adam Hurtubise**. Adam then took me to an amazing steakhouse and treated me to filet oscar and Bookers on the rocks. After a month of eating day-old muffins, I thought I'd died and gone to food heaven. Thanks, Adam! I'm naming a child after you.

Adam and I talked late into the night about this business. He's a savvy guy, and if you don't already read his **blog**, you should.

More stores in Boston and Rhode Island today and tomorrow, and eventually I'll get up north and then west to Albany. Then begins my trek down the East Coast, ending up in Florida by mid August.

If all goes well, I'll hit store 250 tonight, ahead of schedule.

14 comments

Tour Day 28 and 29

Miles driven so far: 5655
Bookstores visited so far: 262
Books signed so far: 2322
Books hand sold so far: 165
Bookstores remaining: 238
Time spent writing fiction on tour: 0
Movies watched on tour: 0
Books read on tour: 0
Minutes of television watched on tour: 0
Magazines/Newspapers read on tour: 0
Video games played on tour: 0

Yesterday I managed to drop in 21 bookstores (it was actually 22, but one of them was a college bookstore that did absolutely nothing for my career.) The day began at 7am, and ended at 11:02pm, right after the last store closed.

When I finally got to my charming Days Inn room in Warwick, Rhode Island (Now With 30% More Stains!), I took a few minutes to dwell on the tour before passing out from weariness.

Since I have so many stores to hit in a limited amount of time, recreation is the first thing to give up while touring (sleep is the second, food is the third.)

I knew this would happen going into this tour, and I try to justify this unhealthy behavior by rationalizing that I'll eat, sleep, have fun, and spend time with my family when I'm a bestseller.

There are many problems with that philosophy, but the most immediate is: how do you define bestsellerdom? Hitting #1 on the NYT list? Hitting #99 on USA Today?

So I've refined my criteria. I'll be more comfortable when I earn twice as much money as I'm earning now. This would mean I wouldn't be living off credit cards between checks, and I'd actually be able to afford health insurance and maybe even have a savings account.

How do I make more money? The answer seems obvious: sell more books. Which is why I'm putting in so much time on the road. I think of this tour as trying to start a fire. Hopefully I'll cause enough sparks that the flames will become self-perpetuating.

Here are some things that I want to happen in my career:

- Earn out my advances.
- Sell more foreign rights, especially to England, Germany, and Australia.
- Write more than one book a year.
- Sell book club rights.
- Option movie rights.

- Make sure my backlist stays in print.
- Get into the big box stores (Walmart, Costco, Target, Sam's Club, etc.)
- Make sure each book sells better than the previous book.

Looking at these goals, it's apparent that many are out of my hands. My agent and my publisher have the control when it comes to subsidiary rights. I can write another book a year, but I don't have any guarantees it will sell.

All I really have power over is how much self-promotion I can do in order to sell more books. If I keep doing that, hopefully everything else will fall into place.

Which is why taking time out to see a movie isn't in my best interest right now.

If you're looking for signed JA Konrath books, visit one of the following bookstores.

Borders Marlboro MA

Walden Marlboro MA

BN Framingham MA

Walden Natick MA

Borders Chestnut Hill MA

Walden Needham MA

BN Chestnut Hill MA

Borders Shrewsbury MA

BN Millbury MA

Walden Worchester MA

Tatnuck Westboro MA

BN Manchester CT

BN Canton CT

BN Waterbury CT

Walden Waterbury CT

Walden Auburn MA

BN Worchester MA

Borders Providence RU

Borders Cranston RI

BN Smithfield RI

Brentanos Boston MA

Walden Medford MA

Walden Saugus MA

Jabberwocky Books Newburyport MA

BN Blemont MA

Walden Lexington MA

Walden Swansea MA

Walden Brockton MA

Walden Taunton MA

Kate's Mystery Books Cambridge MA

Borders Cambridge MA

Borders Braintree MA

Borders Express Swampscott MA

Borders Peabody MA

Borders Express Hanover MA

Waldens Danvers MA

BN Brookline MA

BN Saugus MA

BN Braintree MA

BN Burlington MA

BN Peabody MA

BN Hingham MA

Walden Burlington MA

I'm finishing up Rhode Island and SE Mass today, then on to Albany, Philly, and Jersey over the next few days. I should hit the 300 mark by Tuesday if all goes well. By the time I trek down the east coast and finish Florida, I should have 400 stores. Then in California I'll easily hit another 100, bringing me to my goal.

Hope to see some of you on the road!

17 comments

Tour Day 30, 31, and 32

Miles driven so far: 6289
Bookstores visited so far: 291
Books signed so far: 2548
Books hand sold so far: 169
Bookstores remaining: 209

Rustymobile stories:

- Barry Eisler, while driving the Rustymobile through NY, was unimpressed with the less-than-responsive acceleration of my Suzuki Sidekick. To quote Barry: "What have you got under the hood, a sewing machine?" I responded that it got 32 stitches to the gallon. Then I began to sing the Welcome Back Kotter theme when we entered Brooklyn, which annoyed him to no end.

- In West Haven Connecticut I got a flat tire. The culprit was a screw. I'm not sure how a screw, lying on the road, can pierce a steel belted radial, but this one did. I removed it with, you guessed it, a screwdriver, then did the rubber patch/fix a flat thing.

- The Rustymobile's air conditioning is functioning in this heat wave, but the leak is producing large amounts of water. I had to buy a bigger bucket to catch the dripping on the passenger side.

- I was almost hit by a truck the other day. It was entirely the other driver's fault. I was eating a sandwich, talking on the phone, programming my GPS, and I'd drifted into his lane and he didn't honk his horn fast enough. Some people shouldn't be allowed on the road.

- I locked my keys in my car at a gas station. Since I only have one key, I always check my pockets before I lock the doors. In this case, I was getting rid of some accumlated garbage and left my keys on the front seat, then slammed the door without thinking. Luckily, the window was open a centimeter. I taped together some gas station straws and made the end into a hook, then fished the keys off the seat. My wife told me that I was really clever, but a clever man wouldn't have locked his keys in the car in the first place.

- The aforementioned Barry Eisler, disgusted at how filthy my windshield was, finally pulled into a gas station to clean it himself. True to form, he did a great job, and made it seem like natural causes. Welcome back, Barry!

- I stayed overnight at the lovely and talented **Jackie Kessler's** house, and we tag-teamed a few stores. (Jackie writes paranormal romance, and her new book, ***Hell's Belles***, comes out next year. Check out her new website.) The Rustymobile has a tiny quirk where the passenger side door doesn't lock unless you lift the handle while closing it. Between this, and the water dripping between her feet from the air conditioning, Jackie sweetly said in reference to the Rustymobile, "I really like those signs your publisher made for you."

For those interested, I'll be on **World Talk Radio** Writer's Roundtable today from 12pm until 2pm Eastern. Click on the above link to listen live, or visit it later to hear it in the archives. **James Rollins** will also be on with me.

For those looking to buy signed copies of my books, here's where I've been lately:

Borders North Attleboro MA

Borders Express North Attleboror MA

BN Warwick NY

BN Middletown RI

The Book House of Stuyvesant Plaza Albany NY

Borders Albany NY

Borders Clifton Park NY

BN Albany NY

BN Schenectady NY

Walden Albany NY

Walden Latham NY

Borders Express Schenectady NY

Borders Saratoga Springs NY

BN Saratoga Springs NY

Walden Warwick RI

BN Dartmouth MA

BN East Walpole MA

Walden Saratoga Springa NY

BN Bellingham MA

BN Holyoke MA

BN Pittsfield MA

BN Kingston NY

Walden Kingston NY

Walden Paramus NJ

BN Pughkeepsie NY

Borders Poughkeepsie NY

BN Newbury NY

Borders Ramsey NJ

Borders 230 Garden State Plaza Paramus NJ

Borders Rt 17 Paramus NJ

BN Paramus NJ

Also, the other night I had dinner with the very funny mystery writer Tom Schreck, who just signed a two book deal. He paid for dinner, so I urge everyone reading this to buy his Amazon.com Short stories. Click **here** for the latest. It's funny. You'll like it. And it's only 49 cents.

25 comments

Tour Day 33, 34, and 35

Miles driven so far: 6887
Bookstores visited so far: 332
Books signed so far: 2872
Books hand sold so far: 178
Bookstores remaining: 168

I'm currently in Maryland, staying with writer friend **Wayne Thomas Batson**, author of the **Door Within** trilogy, a YA fantasy series that's a cross between Aragon and CS Lewis. Wayne a great guy, and we visited bookstores throughout the state yesterday.

Prior to that, I was in PA and NY hitting as many stores as I could.

So far, this tour has gone off without any major problems, and I feel as if I'm doing a lot of good. I'm finding it hard to stay connected with people, however. Sometimes I go without internet access for a few days at a stretch, and recently Outlook Express crashed on me, which caused my computer to send dozens of the same emails to the same few people, and reject many others. If you're having problems getting in touch with me, I promise that I'm not ignoring you —-wifi simply hates me.

This tour is taking a bit longer than my original plan, and as a result I'm a few days behind schedule according to the dates I posted on my website. If you are planning to meet me somewhere on the road, or were planning to meet me and we missed each other, I apologize. That apology extends to the bookstores I've intended to visit —-sometimes I may be late, or may even have to skip a store or two, depending on how things are rolling. Keep in mind that I'm trying my best.

Which brings me to some bad news/good news.

The bad news is that I won't be visiting California on this tour, as I'd anticipated. My lovely wife and darling children were supposed to meet me in Florida for a few days of R & R, then I'd fly to San Diego and they'd take the Rustymobile back home. That isn't going to happen. Due to booming business my wife isn't able to get away from work for a week. My deepest regrets to my friends on the West Coast.

But since I'm forced to take the Rustymobile home, I'll be adding some states to the tour. In the latter part of August I'll be visiting Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Missouri (including St. Louis.)

If anyone knows any must-visit bookstores in these states, post them on this blog and I'll do my darnedest to fit them in.

Does this mean I won't reach 500? Hardly.

I'm at 332 stores now, and today will be visiting DC. Then I'll be in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, plus the states I mentioned above.

Florida alone has close to a hundred bookstores in it. Plus I haven't hit my hometown yet. Chicago and the suburbs have close to a hundred bookstores as well.

I will reach, and probably surpass, my original goal. The Rusty Nail 600, perhaps?

I'd like to thank everyone who has been offering encouragement and support and this tour. I've received many calls and emails from writers and fans, and they mean a lot. Really.

If you haven't read the **Huffington Post** lately, there's a nice article about the bookstore vs. blogosphere competition **MJ Rose** and I are having. If you haven't linked to MJ's vidlit yet, you need to do so. Also, buy her new book, **The Venus Fix** —it's a stunner.

If you're looking for signed JA Konrath books, look to these stores:
Chester County Book and Music Company West Chester PA

Borders Express Cherry Hill NJ

BN Marlton NJ

Borders Marlton NJ

BN Langhorne PA

Borders Wilmington DE

Borders Langhorne PA

Walden Bensalem PA

Borders Mt. Laurel NJ

BE Moorestown NJ

BN Wilmington DE

Borders Ft. Lee NJ

Borders Wayne NJ

Borders Livingston NJ

BN Edgewater NJ

BN Clifton NJ

BN Livingston NJ

BN Clark NJ

BN Springfield NJ

Borders Watchung NJ

BN Bridgewater NJ

Walden Trenton NJ

Borders Princeton NJ

BN Princeton NJ

BN Hackensack NJ
Borders Express Baltimore MD

Borders Timonium MD

Borders Express Glen Burnie MD

Borders Express Owings Mills MD

Borders Columbia MD

BN Baltimore MD

BN Towson MD

BN White Marsh MD

BN Ellicott City MD

Walden 200 Pratt Baltimore MD

Walden Eastpoint Mall Baltimore MD

Walden Glen Burnie MD

Walden Towson MD

And now, back to the road...

13 comments

Tour Day 36, 37, 38, 39, and 40

Miles driven so far: 7566
Bookstores visited so far: 378
Books signed so far: 3095
Books hand sold so far: 186
Bookstores remaining: 122
States visited so far: 17 + Washington DC

Not only do I believe that this tour is the most effective thing I've done for my career, as a bonus it has reaffirmed my faith in the kindness of human beings.

I keep running into wonderful, generous people who allow me into their homes, buy me food, and go out of their way to help me out.

Two such folks, Cynthia and Bill Johnson, treated me like royalty when I stayed at their gorgeous home near Richmond, VA.

They're moving this fall, and their show-stopper of a house is on the market. If you, and anyone you know, is moving to Virginia, check out their listing **HERE**.

Thanks again to Bill and Cynthia for their hospitality. And also to Ann, who met us at a great Mexican resturant and bought us all drinks.

While in VA, I met up with fellow writers and bloggers **Bill Blume** and **Patrick Phillips**, and Bill treated me to some damn good Chinese food.

Then I met up with some thriller writers in Raleigh, NC, including **David Terrenoire, J.D. Rhoades**, **Alexandra Sokoloff**, and **Stacey Cochran**. Alex bought me dinner, and Stacey allowed me to crash at his lovely home. If you've been dying to help me out on this tour, but I won't be near your city, you can support me by supporting these fine folks and buying their books.

Over the next few days I'll be in SC, GA, and FLA. If you've been trying to get in touch via email, I'm not ignoring you —I simply have a limited amount of time to reply. Once this tour is over, I'll respond to everyone who has written to me.

If you absolutely need to get in touch, email me your phone number. My wife checks my email for me several times a day, and will pass along your number.

If you absolutely need to get a signed JA Konrath book, visit one of these fine bookstores:

Olssons Alexandra VA

Olssons 19th Street DC

Olssons 7th Street DC

Borders Friendship Heights DC

Borders K Street DC

Borders 14th Street DC

BN 12th Street DC

BN Georgetown DC

Walden Alexandra VA

Walden Bethesda MD

BN Bethesda MD

Walden Silver Springs MD

Borders Germantown MD

BN Rockville MD
BN Gaithersburg MD

Borders Gaithersburg MD

Walden Gaithersburg MD

Borders Kensington MD

BAM Richmond VA

BN Newport News VA

Creatures 'n Crooks Richmond VA

Borders 9750 Broad Street Richmond VA

BN Libbie Place Richmond VA

BN Glen Allen VA

BN Chesapeake VA

Walden Chesapeake VA

BN Short Pump Richmond VA

Walden Parham Rd. Richmond VA

Walden Glen Allen VA

BN Midlothian VA

Fountain Books Richmond VA

BN Hampton VA

BAM Willimasburg VA

Borders Newport News VA

BAM Richmond VA

Carytown Books Richmond VA

Broad Street Books Norfolk VA

BN Commonwealth Midlothian VA

Borders Central Raleigh NC
Borders North Raleigh NC

BN Triangle Town Raleigh NC

BN Crabtree Raleigh NC

BAM Raleigh NC

And finally, ten years ago today I officially became the happiest man on earth. Happy anniversary, Maria! Without your love, support, and encouragement, I wouldn't be where I am today... in North Carolina.

Thanks for ten of the best years a man could have ever asked for. I miss you terribly, and I promise I'll be home soon. Remind the kids they still have a father. Make them visit www.jakonrath.com so they remember what I look like.

I love you today.

19 comments

Tour Day 41, 42, and 43

Miles driven so far: 8359
Bookstores visited so far: 415
Books signed so far: 3355
Books hand sold so far: 191
Bookstores remaining: 85
Money spent on gas: $987
Money spent on hotels: $1122
Money spent on food: $371
Tour cost per store: $5.91

I'm currently in Florida, and will be here for the next few days. The goal of 500 seems within reach, and I'm confident my final bookstore tally will be above that.

I'm thrilled my cost per bookstore is under $6. Add the free hardcover I give to bookstores (which costs my publisher around $6 as well) and I feel I'm doing a lot of good for a total cost of $12. Compare that to advertising, or a conventional tour, and this really seems like the most bang for the buck that any author can do to increase brand awareness.

Waldenbooks is still having a computer problem where they can't order my latest book through BITS (though it can be orders through BIPS), but the last few I've visited have had many copies of RUSTY NAIL on the shelves (something I haven't seen all tour), so it looks like they are finally being shipped. Woo hoo!!! As I've preached before, taking up shelf space is essential to finding readers.

Of course, the only sure-fire way to sell a book is word-of-mouth. This can be done by the author, friends, family, booksellers, librarians, and to a lesser extent with reviews, ads, and publicity.

But word of mouth won't lead to a point-of-sale purchase if your book isn't in the store.

Like all sales, the goal is three-fold:

1. Inform consumers that the product exists.
2. Attract those consumers who are interested in your type of product.
3. Make it really easy for them to buy your product.

Writers are lucky in that readers actively seek out books. While nothing beats a solid recommendation, many books are sold accidentally, by a consumer browsing the shelves for something of interest.

Real estate plays a large part in these accidental discoveries. The more titles you have in print, and the more copies of each individual title a bookstore carries, the likelier you are to be discovered. Face out has a better chance of being sold than spine out. The new release tables, the paperback towers, the dump boxes, the end caps, the counter displays, and the staff recommended picks, all get ***many*** more looks than the books shelved in the sections. A big stack of a single title subconsciously tells buyers it's an important book that is obviously selling well.

Publishers know this. They pay big money for coop in these prime real estate places. They print oodles of books so bookstores order oodles of copies and create these displays. And there is an element of self-fulfilling prophecy at play here —-more books printed usually means more books sold.

But not always.

I've learned two disturbing terms on this tour. One is called "remaindered on shelf."

When a book is remaindered, no more orders are coming in, and the warehouse discounts its copies to sell at a loss. If you've ever bought a hardcover in a bookstore for $5.99, it was a remainder. Here's how the process works:

1. A bookstore orders 100 copies of a new hardcover. They can order from the publisher at a discount of 42%-50% off cover price, or from a distributor at typically 40% off (Ingram, Baker & Taylor, Partners, CDS, Koen, etc).

2. They sell 60 copies. Then they ship the other 40 copies back and get a refund.

3. After a title is no longer being ordered, the publisher remainders it, selling it at a loss to recoup printing cost. The author makes no money from this sale, but that's not a bad thing —remember, the more books you have 'out there' the likelier you are to be discovered.

4. Bookstores buy remainder titles in bulk for a few dollars a book, then sell them for a few bucks more.

As I understand it, bookstores are fine with buying large numbers of a new hardcover, because they can return them if needed. However, the return process is a pain, and it is costly (the bookstore usually pays for shipping back the books.)

Enter "remaindered on shelf." Instead of shipping back the books, a bookstore is given a partial refund and told to keep the book and discount it 50% off. This eliminates the need for shipping back and forth (which is expensive and time consuming.)

Is this the way of the future? Time will tell.
Another current trend is called "strip and bind." When the hardcovers come back, rather than get remaindered they get stripped of their covers and rebound as trade paperbacks, which typically have a longer shelf life than hardcovers.

Is this a smart way to save some money, or is this a gentle hint to publishers that perhaps they are printing waaaaay too many books?

But therein lies the problem. The more books in print, the more that will sell. So publishers have to print too many, in order to sell a lot.

As long as books are returnable or refundable, there will be waste. If a book is lucky, the waste becomes a remainder, a remainder on shelf, or a strip and bind. Unlucky books go into the pulping machine, which isn't helpful to anyone, unless you're a spruce.

Which brings me back to shelf space. More is better. This involves an element of risk on behalf of the publisher, because a poor sell through and big returns can be a financial disaster. But if the books are good, backlist sales are steady, and word of mouth is spreading, bookstore real estate is the next logical step. Coop dollars for the new release tables, and a high enough print run to justify a bigger discount to bookstores (which is passed on to the reader as a 20% discount that most stores have) will go a long way toward making an author a bestseller.

If you need signed JA Konrath books, look to these fine establishments:

Joseph-Beth Charlotte NC

Borders Morrocroft Charlotte NC

Borders Stonecrest Charlotte NC

Borders Cary NC

BN Cary NC

BN New Hope Commons Charlottee NC

BN Sharon Charlottee NC

BN Arboretum Charlotte NC

BN Pineville NC

BAM Burlington NC

Walden Pineville NC

BAM Salisbury NC

BAM Concord NC

Walden Durham NC

BN Greensboro NC

Walden Greensboro NC

Borders Greensboro NC

Walden Winston-Salem NC

BN Winston-Salem NC

Borders Winston-Salen NC

Aliens and Alibis Columbia SC

BN Forest Acres SC

BN Columbia SC

Waldenbooks Dutch Square Columbia SC

Waldenbooks Columbiana Circle Columbia SC

The Happy Bookseller Columbia SC

BAM 4080 Forest Columbia SC

BAM 275 Harrison Columbia SC

Walden Orangeburg SC

BAM Savannah GA

BN Savannah GA

Walden Savannah GA

BN Atlantic Jacksonville FL

BAM Brunswick GA

BAM Atlantic Jacksonville FL

19 comments

Tour Day 44, 45, 46, 47, and 48

Miles driven so far: 9150
Bookstores visited so far: 466
Books signed so far: 3706
Books hand sold so far: 198
Bookstores remaining: 34
Booksellers met so far: 833
Coasters signed on tour: 8950
Coasters signed this year: 17988
Coasters signed since Whiskey Sour debuted: 28000
Rough estimate of books signed since Whiskey Sour debuted: 13500

Though I didn't start the driving part of the tour until July 5, I began this tour June 29 at Thrillerfest, so technically I've been on tour for 52 days now.

That's a long time for an author to tour.

If all goes well, I'll reach my goal of 500 in Tampa on Saturday, then hit a few dozen extra stores driving home from Florida, and close to a hundred more in Chicago and Wisconsin.

September brings the **Midwest Literary Festival**, **Bouchercon**, and a mini tour of Michigan with author **David Ellis** to coincide with a book festival in Grand Haven.

I was tired four weeks ago. Now I'm flat-out exhausted. But my spirits remain high, in a large part thanks to other authors who are meeting me on the road.

In the last few days I have enjoyed the hospitality of **Bob Morris**, author of **Jamaica Me Dead**, **James O. Born**, author of **Escape Clause**, and **PJ Parrish**, author of **An Unquiet Grave**. Not only did these authors welcome me into their homes, each also cooked me dinner; shrimp and grits, garlic chicken, and homemade spaghetti, respectively. Bob's was excellent, as was Kris Montee's. Jim is still trying to convince me that what I ate was, indeed, chicken. But the potatoes weren't bad —-assuming they were actually potatoes. Actually, they were pretty bad. I think he seasoned them with sand. I enjoy his books — they're gritty. Unfortunately, so is his cooking. Jim does have a really nice house, though.

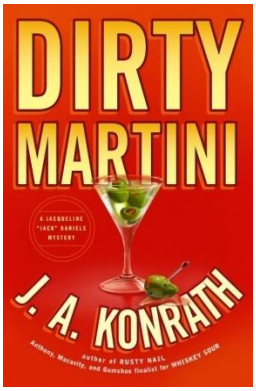
I also got to meet the bundle of positive energy that is **Barbara Parker** (author of **The Perfect Fake**), and hung out with the always wonderful **Christine Kling** (author of **Bitter End**.)

Thanks to **Barry Eisler** as well. Even though he finished his own exhausting 60 day/320 bookstore tour a few weeks ago, Barry has kept in touch with me while I'm on the road, which has saved me several times from falling asleep behind the wheel of the Rustymobile and dying in a buring, bleeding, screaming explosion of hot asphalt death and signed coasters.

I also was treated to a free night in an apartment, thanks to fan Terrie Moran. She read about my tour, and graciously allowed me to stay in her home in Delray Beach while she was in New York. Thanks, Terrie!

I'm getting worried that my acknowledgements page in Dirty Martini will be longer than the actual book.

Speaking of Dirty Martinis...



Coming Summer 2007.

The art department at Hyperion continues to amaze me with their brilliance. I LOVE this cover.

And if you're looking for current autographed JA Konrath titles, visit one of the following fine literary establishments:

Murder On The Beach, Delray Beach FL

Borders Aventura FL

BN Aventura FL

BN Pembroke Pines FL

BN Palm Beach Gardens FL

BN Hollywood FL

Walden Aventura FL

Walden Pembroke Pines FL

Borders Jensen Beach FL

Walden Palm Beach Gardens FL

Borders Winter Park FL

Borders Sand Lake Orlando FL

Borders Ocoee FL

BN Colonial Drive Orlando FL

BN Orange Blossum Orlando FL

BN Altamonte Springs FL

BN Sand Lake Orlando FL

BN Alafaya Orlando FL

BN Oveido FL

Walden Colonial Orlando FL

Walden Conroy Orlando FL

Walden Winter Park FL

Walden Organe Blossum Orlando FL

Borders Jacksonville FL

BN Atlantic Jacksonville FL

BN San Jose Jacksonville FL

Borders Sandford FL

Borders Altamonte Springs FL

BN Daytona Beach FL

Walden Daytona Beach FL

BAM Cassel Berry FL

BAM San Jose Jacksonville FL

BN St. Augustine FL

BAM Daytona Beach FL

BAM Sandford FL

Walden Boynton Beach FL

BN Boynton Beach FL

Borders Coral Springs FL

BAM Delray Beach FL

Walden Pomano Beach FL

BN Wellington FL

BN Boca Raton FL

Walden Boca Raton FL

Borders Ft. Lauderdale FL

BN West Palm Beach FL

Borders Boca Raton FL

Walden Coral Springs FL

BAM Deerfeild Beach FL

Walden Wellington FL

Back to the road...

9 comments

Tour Day 49, 50, and 51

Miles driven: 10007
Books signed: 3964
Books hand sold: 203
Booksellers met: 936
Bookstores visited: 500

I rock.

43 comments

Tour Day 52, 53, 54, and 55

Miles driven: 11457
Books signed: 4066
Books hand sold: 214
Booksellers met: 952
Bookstores visited: 504

I'm happy to be home again. But the tour isn't over yet. I'm planning on visiting at least 5 bookstores a day until I finish the Northern Illinois area. Then I'll be doing limited visits to Wisconsin and Michigan, along with a few events in the upcoming months.

Catching up on all of my email is a daunting task —I've got over a thousand in the in-box that require responses —but if you're waiting for some kind of response from me, you should be getting it soon.

Several people have emailed asking how the bookstore visits are going. Are the booksellers always happy to see me? Have there been any strange or terrible signings?

Here are a few snippets from the tour. Each bookstore drop-in begins with me finding my books on the shelf and taking them to the Information Desk (or Customer Service, or a register.)

JA: Hi. My name is JA Konrath, and I'm a Hyperion author on a national tour promoting my third hardcover, RUSTY NAIL. Thanks for carrying my books.

Bookseller: Thanks for coming by. Would you like to speak to a manager?

JA: If one is available, I'd love to say hello.

A manager is called. I talk about the series, sign the stock, sign some coasters, and ask who the biggest mystery reader in the store is. That person gets a signed copy of Rusty Nail.

JA: I'm also thanking booksellers in my fourth novel, DIRTY MARTINI, coming out next year. So, if you'd like, write down your names and you'll be immortalized in print.

Booksellers write down their names. There are plenty of smiles and hand shakes and thank yous, and then I'm off to my next store. That's the typical signing, and about how 85% of them play out. It's a good, productive experience for everyone involved.

Ten percent of them played out like this:

JA: Hi. My name is JA Konrath, and I'm a Hyperion author on a national tour promoting my third hardcover, RUSTY NAIL. Thanks for carrying my books.

Bookseller: Oh my god, I love your books!

JA: Thanks!

Bookseller: I still can't eat Halloween candy after that scene in your first one.

JA: Thank you.

Bookseller: Wait right here, I have to introduce you to some of my co-workers.

In some cases, the booksellers were expecting me, and had anywhere from 20 to 140 copies of my books for me to sign. This happened roughly a dozen times, and every time I was humbled and thrilled.

Did I meet with some apathy? Sure. Usually, booksellers love to meet authors and love to read. But all businesses employ some people who hate their jobs. Here are a few episodes that stand out:

JA: Hi. My name is JA Konrath, and I'm a Hyperion author on a national tour promoting my third hardcover, RUSTY NAIL. Thanks for carrying my books.

Bookseller: Okay.

JA: Can we check to see if there are any others in the store?

Bookseller: Check the mystery section.

JA: I just checked the mystery section. That's where I found these. Do you have any others?

Bookseller: Maybe there are more on a table somewhere.

JA: Can you help me find them?

Bookseller: I can't be bothered with that.

I'm shocked by this. I've met over 900 booksellers, and they have always been helpful and courteous. I look around, but don't see any other customers in the building, so it isn't as if I'm preventing her from helping anyone else.

JA: Well, I'll go take another look.

I find some copies on an endcap and bring them back to the Information desk.

JA: I found a few. Thanks for having them on the endcap.

Bookseller: You can't sign those.

JA: Pardon me?

Bookseller: If you sign them, we can't return them.

JA: Actually, you can return signed copies. Stores do it all the time.

Bookseller: Well, you're not signing them.

JA: Can I speak to a manager?

Bookseller: I am a manager.

JA: I'm confused. Normally, managers are happy that I'm signing copies, because they have a better sell-through.

Bookseller: You're not signing anything in this store.

JA: Well. Nice to meet you. What's your name again?

Bookseller: Diane.

JA: Thanks for your help, Diane. Do you have a last name?

Bookseller: I don't give that out.

JA: So on your business cards it just says Diane?

Bookseller: I don't have a business card.

JA: A pity.

I left the above store wondering if I should alert a GM or DM or someone to let them know that they have a crazy person working for them. After thinking about it for a while, I decided to let it go. There's nothing that could be done to Diane that real life already hasn't done to her.

I was also refused signing stock at another store, and it played out like this:

Bookseller: It's a corporate policy. We don't allow signing stock.

JA: Really? I've already signed stock at over forty of your other locations.

Bookseller: They shouldn't have allowed it.

JA: The last one gave me extra stickers from your store that say AUTOGRAPHED COPY. See? These are from your chain.

Bookseller: We can't sign returned stock.

JA: Why is that?

Bookseller: They don't accept them back.

JA: But how do they know the copies are signed, when they're returned? Don't you strip off the paperback covers?

Bookseller: The sticker on the front. We're not supposed to put stickers on the covers.

JA: What about that big stack of books over there, with the 30% off stickers on them?

Bookseller: We don't allow authors to sign books.

JA: How about I put a signed coaster in each book?

Bookseller: That would be fine.

While Diane was openly hostile, this manager simply seemed robotic. I signed some coasters and left.

Like everything you do in life, you can't have a 100% success rate. Here's a scenario that happened to me twice:

JA: Hi, I'm an author. Is a manager around?

Bookseller: Sure. I'll find one.

I wait around for five minutes, then find another bookseller.

JA: Can I speak to a manager? I'm a writer on a national tour and am in town for a limited time. I dropped in to sign stock and say hello.

Bookseller #2: I'll get one for you.

I wait another five minutes.

Bookseller #2: The manager is busy right now. Can you wait a minute?

JA: Sure.

I wait for ten more minutes. No manager appears. I try to engage a few other booksellers by asking if they like mysteries. None of them do. I sign the stock and put it back on the shelf myself.

Now, I probably wasn't purposely snubbed. It may have simply been some miscommunication, or the manager on duty was super busy. Usually, booksellers are happy to help me. I've met almost a thousand booksellers, and 99.9% of them were experts in customer service.

Some, like this one, were not:

JA: Thanks for carrying my books. Can we check to see if there are any more paperbacks in the store?

Bookseller: We had a bunch. I just stripped them and sent them back.

JA: Ouch. You stripped them?

Bookseller: If they don't sell in 90 days, they get returned.

JA: You know, the book has only been out for 45 days.

Bookseller: Well, we needed the shelf space.

Ouch indeed. At another store, I pulled some of my paperbacks from the shelf, and the cover on one was 95% cut off, hanging by a thread. Apparently the earnest bookseller had stripped one too many, and reshelved it.

Those were the only two stores where I encountered returns. In at least 200 of the stores I visited, the booksellers ordered more copies after meeting me. Which, of course, always resulted in an outpouring of gratitude from me.

The following strange scenario happened to me twice:

JA: Thanks for carrying my books. Do you mind if I sign them for you?

Bookseller: Can I see some ID?

This puzzled me. If I were some lunatic, signing other people's books, wouldn't I pick an author more well known than JA Konrath? Wouldn't I try to signed some Koontz or Clancy?

In both cases, I showed ID, and the visit turned out to be worthwhile. Still, what an odd thing to ask.

I was also very surprised by how many stores stocked all three of my titles. At least half, probably more. In 3 of the 5 major chains, my books were stocked automatically, so even if they were missing a title, a quick computer check showed that some were on order. That felt really good.

The following scenario happened a handful of times, and it always blew me away:

Bookseller: Everyone in the store loves your books!

JA: Thanks! That means a lot. Really. Without people like you, I wouldn't have a career.

Bookseller: I'm buying this one. Can you sign a copy for me?

JA: I'd love to.

Bookseller #2: I want a copy too. Can you sign it?

JA: Absolutely.

Bookseller #3, #4, & #5: We're buying these. Please sign them for us.

JA: Sure. Thanks. You guys are awesome.

In a few cases, maybe ten, I visited stores and they didn't have any copies of my books. I'd give them a free copy of RUSTY NAIL and say that I hope they stock them in the future. Most of them ordered copies right then.

Several times on tour, an author friend would invite me to do an impromptu speech at a bookstore, where a writer group was meeting. The last time this happened was in Tampa, where I met a few Florida writers.

Big hugs and sloopy kisses to **Jeff Strand** and **Lynne Hansen**, who invited me to the shindig and then took me out for a lovely lunch. If you like my writing, you'll also enjoy Jeff's, who writes with the same combination of funny and twisted. Lynne does horror for the YA crowd, and if you have children, her books come highly recommended by me.

So, what's the final verdict? Was all of my running around worthwhile?

Absolutely. While every bookstore I visited didn't result in a home run, the vast majority of them were terrific. Meeting booksellers, signing stock, and passing our free books, is easily the most effective thing I've ever done for my career. I feel like I've actually made a difference, and I believe I'll continue to benefit from this tour for years to come.

Plus, who else can say they were on tour for so long that they actually got callouses on their fingers from driving?

If you're looking for signed JA Konrath books, look no further than these fine establishments:

Books & Books Coral Gables FL

BN Coral Gables FL

BN Naples FL

Border Naples FL

Borders Sarasota FL

BN Ft. Myers FL

Walden Ft. Myers FL

BAM Ft. Myers FL

Walden Port Charlotte FL

BN Sarasota FL

Walden 3501 Tamiami Sarasote FL

Walden 8201 Tamiami Sarasota FL

Borders Plantation FL

BAM Sunrise FL

Borders 909 Dale Mabry Tampa FL

Borders 12500 Dale Mabry Tampa FL

Borders St. Perersburg FL

BN 213 Dale Mabry Tampa FL

BN 11802 Dale Mabry Tampa FL

BN St. Petersburg FL

Walden West Shore Blvd Tampa FL

Walden West Shore Mall Tampa FL

Walden Folwer Tampa FL
Walden Citrus PArk Tampa FL

BN Ocala FL

MAN Ocala FL

BN Gainesville FL

Borders Gainesville FL

Walden Gainesville FL

BN Macon GA

BAM Centerville GA

BAM Macon GA

BAM Valdosta GA

Book Warehouse Lake Park GA

BN Schaumburg IL

Borders Schaumburg IL

Walden Schaumburg Woodfield IL

I'm going to continue to post tour stats on my blog, as I visit more local stores, but from this moment on blog entries will revert to my pre-tour intention: posting about the publishing business, how it works, and what newbies need to know.

While I'm happy to be done, I'm only getting started...

18 comments

The Rusty Nail 600

Since the Rusty Nail 500 ended in late August I've visited Wisconsin four times, Michigan twice, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana. I've done sixteen events, and dropped in 86 bookstores.

That brings the total number of bookstores I've visited to 590.

Today I'll visit four more, and tomorrow I'll be in Wisconsin again for Murder in Muskego http://www.ci.muskego.wi.us/library/murder_and_mayhem.htm along with David Morrell, Tess Gerritsen, Blake Crouch, John Connolly, Julia Spencer-Fleming, and Libby Fisher Hellmann, among others. Come if you can.

During my Wisconsin trip, I'll visit six more stores, which will make my 500 tour reach 600.

That's a lot of bookstores.

I get asked a lot, "Was it worth it?"

This question is wrong. The correct question should be, "Is it worth it?" Because the tour will never truly end.

I may never do something as intensive or dramatic as 600 stores in six months. But as long as I'm writing books, I'll be stopping in bookstores. Because it is worth it.

As much as I'd rather be doing other things.

Which brings up today's blog topic: excuses.

As people who get paid to lie for a living, writers are experts at rationaliztion. There are always reasons we didn't make the deadline, didn't answer the email, didn't do that last booksigning.

In my last blog entry, I stressed the importance of setting goals that you have control over.

- Stay at a signing until you sell ten books.
- Meet thirty new people at a conference.
- Write 2000 words a day.
- Drop in 100 bookstores.

These goals are attainable, because they are specific and depend upon a direct effort on your part.

But even if we set goals like these, we usually factor in for comfort. Selling ten books at a signing is easier than selling twenty. Visiting 100 bookstores is easier than 150. We rarely push ourselves to our limits.

This is sad, because we can only learn our limits by going beyond them.

Unfortunately, that involves a lot of time and energy. So we aim low in our goals. We do the barest minimum, and then make excuses. We justify our actions.

In short, we say "can't" when we really mean "won't."

A lot of people think I enjoy self-promotion. They think I'm good at it because I have some sort of self-promotion gene. They tell me, "I can't do what you're doing."

They're wrong on all counts.

I never knew what I was capable of until I pushed myself. And I pushed myself not because I enjoy it, but because I'm ambitious and determined to succeed. I work hard at it. I work so hard at it, I've been accused of setting the bar too high. I've been accused of doing the publisher's job for them. I've even been accused of bringing about change for the worse in the publishing world, where publishers demand that authors self-promote. I've made some people very angry.

If you feel that way, who are you really angry with? (Hint: check a mirror.)

I believe that all writers should push themselves. Your goals should be out of your comfort range. You should quit limiting your potential and instead see how far you can go. This doesn't just apply to writing. This applies to life.

Stop saying "can't" and watch how far it takes you. It took me to 600 bookstores.

20 comments

Perpetual Touring

The traditional book tour, whether publisher-financed or author-financed, usually begins when the new title is released, and lasts a few weeks or maybe even months. Then, traditionally, the author takes a break from promoting and writes their next book.

This is an archaic, and ineffective, way to tour. Before I get into why, let's pinpoint the reasons for touring.

1. **To meet booksellers.** A bookseller you schmooze is a bookseller who will potentially handsell you.
2. **To reinforce media exposure.** And vice versa. You get reviews, interviews, and local newspaper/radio/tv coverage when you have a new book out, as the new book is the hook/spin/platform for the publicity.
3. **To announce a new book to your old fans**. A book tour is a way to meet your fanbase, remind them you have a new title out, and encourage them to meet you in person.
4. **To make new fans.** You'll sell books to people who have never heard of you before, and might not have ever heard of you had it not been for your tour.
5. **Signed books sell better than unsigned books.** An autograph is a perceived value, and the signed copies will often be face-out on the shelf, which is more exposure.

In essence, a book tour is all about spreading the word. As I've mentioned many times before, it's doubtful your tour will pay for itself in books sold, even if you're a bestseller. But it still remains the most effective way to inform the world about your books, because you are your book's best salesperson, whether you like it or not. The more people you can reach, the better your book will do.

Which brings us to the current book tour model. Touring for two months, then disappearing for ten months.

Considering how important book sales are to your career, isn't it odd that you're only spending 1/5 of your professional time meeting people? And that this time is all bunched together, rather than spread out? Wouldn't it make more sense to do as much touring as possible, even as late as six, eight, or ten months after your book has been released?

Now, I know what you're thinking.

JA, if I tour all year, when will I have time to write?

JA, I can't afford to tour all year.

JA, won't I get overexposed if I tour all year?

JA, I have a family/fulltime job and don't have that much time to travel.

JA, isn't this just me doing my publisher's job?

JA, you're damn sexy.

Let's address these thoughts.

JA, if I tour all year, when will I have time to write?

If your books don't sell, you'll have all the time in the world to write, because you'll no longer be able to get a contract.

Writing a good book is the most important thing you can do for your career. But if no one knows about your books, it doesn't matter how good it is —it will flop. I spend about 90% of my professional time promoting. But I write pretty fast, and writing is my fulltime gig.

So how much time should you spend? I say, half your time.

Is that too much? Give up TV, surfing the Internet, and 1 hour of sleep per night, and that gives you an extra 1200 hours a year.

Everyone has something they can give up or cut back on to make more time. It's just a question of wanting it bad enough. If you don't want it bad enough, why are you reading my blog?

JA, I can't afford to tour all year.

No kidding. Not only is it financially draining, but it's incredibly hard. But you don't have to. Perpetual touring isn't about being on the road 365 days a year. Perpetual touring is about making sure you have a continuous bookstore presence. This can be done by:

- Visiting bookstores on your vacation.
- Visiting every bookstore within 100 miles of your home.
- Taking weekends to visit nearby states.
- Visiting bookstores when you are at conferences and traveling.
- Not ever dismissing opportunities.

I'm guessing that there are many stores within driving distance you haven't visited yet. Why haven't you? And why haven't you visited your local stores more than once?

The holidays are almost upon us. Why don't you have a local signing for the day after Thanksgiving, or the weekends before X-mas?

There are always opportunities to visit bookstores, and they don't have to involve spending a lot of money. Out of all the mystery writers who went to Bouchercon, how many signed at the 7 bookstores stores in Madison? I did. Out of all the thriller writers who visited Thrillerfest, how many signed at the 25 stores in Phoenix? I did. You can too. Pull yourself away from the bar, stop going to panels that won't teach you anything, and work the town.

JA, won't I get overexposed if I tour all year?

The more exposure you get, the more exposure you get. I don't know of a single author who became overexposed by visiting bookstores.

JA, I have a family/fulltime job and don't have that much time to travel.

Make the time. Or don't. No one is forcing you.

You don't have to do any bookstore visits at all, and you still may become successful.

And that knocking sound in your engine may correct itself without you doing anything.

And that growth on your lung may just disappear on its own.

And a rich uncle you never knew you had may die and bequeath you his fortune.

But it's probably smarter to be a little proactive.

The more bookstores you visit, the more books you'll sell. Guaranteed.

JA, isn't this just me doing my publisher's job?

Of course. Writers do all the work, and Big New York Publishing exploits us and makes zillions of dollars from our efforts, and we should be grateful for the opportunity to be exploited. Every time a book is successful is because the writer is brilliant, and every time a book flops is because the publisher didn't do anything to promote it.

Or not.

Look, it's really very simple. Every book you sell, you make more money. The more money you make, the more your publisher will continue to sell your books. How hard is that to understand?

You can bemoan the hard work all you want, but what job isn't hard? You thought all you had to do was write and that was enough? Well, you were wrong. There's no Santa Claus either. Welcome to real life.

JA, you're damn sexy.

I know. It's a curse.

Can you define Perpetual Touring again?

Perpetual Touring is continuing to visit bookstores year round, not just after a new book is released. For example, this year alone I've visited 68 bookstores after my 500 bookstore tour ended, and several dozen before my tour began. I'm also planning on visiting 30 more before the end of the year.

Why should authors Perpetually Tour?

1. Your backlist may be even more important than selling your current title, because your backlist is what grows your audience.
2. It is potentially more valuable to visit bookstores *after* the coop has ended, because signed books will be moved to an endcap, giving you free coop space.
3. If you limit your publicity to 2 months a year, you're missing 10 months of opportunity to find new readers.
4. Visiting the same bookstore more than once will give you the chance to meet new employees, and touch base with old friends.
5. Touring year round means there is never any time for the booksellers to fully forget about you, and that you'll have constant spikes in sales.
6. Selling the book is almost as important as writing the book, and deserves a large amount of your time.

The bottom line: if there's a bookstore nearby, there's no reason you shouldn't stop in. And if it's been several weeks since you've been in a bookstore, you need to correct that right now. Even if it's a bookstore you've been in already. Even if it's a bookstore that doesn't normally carry your books. Even if you don't have the time or the money or the energy or the desire.

Get thee to a bookstore. You'll thank me for it later.

38 comments

Where's Konrath? Blog Touring

I never believed that blog book tours work.

A blog book tour, for the uninitiated, is when an author appears on as many other blogs as possible, promoting their book. Sort of like actors doing a talk show circuit to promote a new movie.

I've never tried it before, but I came by my beliefs fairly. A few years ago, I had a contest with my friend and fellow author (not to mention self-promotional genius) **MJ Rose**. Our contest, if memory serves, was a virtual vs. physical book tour. She tried to make guest appearances on as many blogs as possible, while I tried to visit as many bookstores as possible.

I won. Not because MJ isn't an amazing marketer. But because this was 2006, and there weren't as many blogs, or blog readers, back then.

Well, now it's 2009, and I want to give it a shot.

As I've said ad nauseum, people don't like ads. They like information and entertainment.

So I'm going to give it to them. And I need your help.

I'm going to be contacting many of the blogs that I've linked to. Check the sidebar to see those blogs.

My blog, A Newbie's Guide to Publishing, gets several hundred thousand unique hits a year. You can see by the FEEDJIT Live Traffic Map (that world map picture in the upper righthand corner) how many people are currently reading me.

Would you like my readers to become your readers? Here's how we can make that happen.

I invite you to invite me on your blog. You can interview me about anything at all, like promotion, or writing, or publishing. You can ask me to guest blog on specific topics. You can have me do a meme list. The sky is the limit.

Then, in March. I'm not going to blog anything new. Instead, every day I'm going to post a link and tell my readers to go to your blog, where I'm appearing.

You know how blogging works. You'll get a lot of new hits from new readers, and if they like you, they'll bookmark you and return.

Besides linking to your blog on my blog (which gets 700 to 1000 hits a day), I'll link to your blog on my Twitter (383 friends), on my Facebook (1641 friends) and on my MySpace (13218 friends.)

Win-win. You get new readers. I reach new demographics.

Will this work? Hell if I know. But in my last newsletter, I asked for fifty people to review my latest novel, and I got well over a hundred responses.

If I can fill up every day in March with guest blog spots, I think it would mean more traffic for everyone involved.

So over the next few days, I'll be contacting bloggers to ask to guest post.

If you'd like me to guest post on your blog, contact me and we'll set a date in March.

I love experiments like this. If it fails, authors will know that it's a big waste of time and effort. But if it works, we could actually be laying down the framework for a way to self-promote that doesn't involve airplanes, hotels, author escorts, or big bucks.

Email me at haknort(at)wowway.com if you want to give this a shot.

25 comments

Where's Konrath? Blog Tour Day #31 Finale

Well, this is it. The last day of the JA Konrath/Jack Kilborn blog tour.

I'm sad to see it end.

If you're just tuning in, I visited a different blog every day in March. I also gave away many copies of my new horror novel, Afraid by Jack Kilborn, to bloggers and asked them to post reviews.

The response has been overwhelming.

First I visit JD Rhoades, where I explain how we can save the economy:

THE. BEST. BOOK. CONTEST. EVER.

Then I visit one of my favorite authors for some Q & A:

Interview with Tess Gerritsen

Next, it's a treat for Jack Daniels fans. I collaborated on an original Jack Daniels story with my friend, author Tom Schreck, who writes the Duffy Mysteries. Tom's books are a combination of action and jokes, just like mine, so it was a lot of fun to bring our main characters together.

You can download the 6400 word story for free (it is printable, Kindle compatible, and can be read on your computer or a variety of 3G cell phones) and read our intentionally hostile interview, here:

Interview with Tom Schreck + Free Jack Daniels Story

Here's a great Afraid review at I Would Rather Be Reading:

Afraid Review by Bryan Sims

Finally, if you haven't read my Amazon blog, please check it out. Afraid is officially released today, so if you've reviewed me elsewhere on the Internet, you can now post your review on Amazon.com as well.

Joe's Amazon Blog

I want to thank everyone who hosted me on this blog tour. I appeared on well over a hundred blogs in thirty-one days, and I'm humbled and grateful for all the support the blogging community has given me and my little horror novel.

It been a long, strange trip, and it's also been a lot of fun. I'm also not quite done yet —a few other blogs will be featuring me in the upcoming month of April.

I'll blog about the results of this tour next week. But in the meantime, I've got to start hitting some bookstores for some real-world promotion. My first official signing for Afraid is on Saturday, April 4, 2pm-4pm, at the Waldenbooks in Peru, IL. Keep an eye on my website for other appearances.

If you haven't followed the tour from the beginning, here are all the places where I appeared (with the many duplicate posts removed.)

1. Interview with James Rollins
2. The Importance of Setting
3. Interview with Karin Gillespie
4. Interview with Myself
5. Afraid Review at Bestsellers World
6. Afraid Review by Conda V. Douglas
7. Afraid Review by the Fantasy Book Critic
8. Marketing Dos and Don'ts
9. Afraid Book Giveaway
10. Jack Kilborn Cake Recipe
11. Afraid Review by Jude Hardin
12. Vote for the Scariest Book Ever
13. Very Bad Self Promotion Tips
14. Joe's Top 3 Horror Books
15. Anatomy of a Horror Scene
16. Afraid Review by Sandy
17. Afraid Review by Harry Hate
18. Afraid Review by The Sci Fi Genre Review
19. The Call To Action
20. Dark Sex Scenes
21. The Effectiveness of Blog Touring
22. Writing Techniques for Afraid
23. Afraid Review by The Farm Report
24. The Cumulative Effect of Marketing
25. Interview with Basil Sands
26. Interview with Dana Strotheide
27. Afraid review by Dana Strotheide
28. Afraid Review by Journey of a Bookseller
29. Interview with April Henry
30. Interview with the Women of Mystery
31. Interview with Wayne Thomas Batson
32. The Importance of Reviews
33. Joe the Stay At Home Dad
34. My iPod Playlist
35. Interview with Elizabeth Craig
36. The Future of EBooks
37. Small Press vs. Large Press
38. Afraid Review by Peg Brantly
39. Answering Newbie Questions
40. Interview with Marci Catania

41. Interview by Horrorfind
42. Afraid Review by Marci Catania
43. Afraid Review by Rowena Cherry
44. Interview with David Jack Bell
45. Reading and Writing Podcast
46. Afraid Review by Elizabeth Sneed
47. JA Konrath Interviews Jack Kilborn
48. Essential Self Promotion Tips
49. Interview at Feng Shui Assassin
50. Page 69 of Afraid
51. Page 99 of Afraid
52. Afraid Review by Sherrif Joe
53. Afraid Review by Marilyn Meredith
54. Writers Pimping Writers
55. Write a Story in 20 Words or Less
56. Afraid Review by RJ Medak
57. Rejected Dr. Seuss Titles
58. How to Read Afraid If You're a Scaredy Cat
59. Afraid Review by Ophelia Julien
60. On Extreme Horror
61. Interview with Amy Krueger
62. Interview with Dana Kaye
63. Afraid Review by Horrorview
64. Afraid Review by Susan Tunis
65. Afraid Review by Sara J. Henry
66. Ridiculous Interview with Jeff Strand
67. Too Many One Liners
68. Interview with James Knapp
69. Noir Interview by Robert W. Walker
70. Why You Shouldn't Blog
71. What's The Scariest Thing That Ever Happened to You?
72. Interview with Judy Larsen
73. Interview with A Writer's Group
74. Interview at The Kerrie Show
75. Why I Love Aduiobooks
76. All About Literary Agents
77. Write a Story in 70 Words
78. Is Afraid Torture Porn?
79. Interview with Headdeask
80. Afraid Review by Barbara Poole
81. Dead Pets and Other Funny Things
82. Pushing the Envelope
83. Afraid Review by Shots UK

84. Afraid Review by Dark Scribe
85. Afraid Review by The List
86. Afraid Review by Publishers Weekly
87. The Future of Publishing
88. Touring with Joanna Slan
89. Interview with Gabrielle Harboy
90. Interview with Kathleen McDade
91. Free Book Contest at The Rap Sheet
92. My Funniest Rejection Letters
93. Radio Interview with Rowena Cherry
94. Writing Sex Scenes with Jack Daniels
95. Top Ten Editing Tips
96. Horror Novels I Wish I'd Written

See you on the road...

8 comments

Where's...Enough Already! Blog Tour Recap

I began my monumental, trend-setting, ground-breaking, superhuman, death-defying, egomaniacal, much talked-about blog tour on February 28th, on a whim.

I had heard of blog tours; authors visit other blogs and guest post and/or answer questions about their current book. But I'd never attempted one. Partly because I didn't want to impose on my blogging peers. Partly because it seemed like a lot of work, with no guaranteed results.

But in February, before Afraid came out, I'd used my newsletter to solicit reviews in exchange for free copies of Afraid, asking people to blog about the book. I received well over a hundred responses from bloggers willing to review it. My publisher, who was behind me completely, wanted a way to keep track of who was getting books and reviewing them, so I suggested posting links on my blog every time a review came in.

That got me to thinking. In conjunction with the review campaign, wouldn't it be a good idea to supplement that with interviews and excerpts of the novel?

Over the years, I've managed to trade links with quite a few bloggers. I'm lucky that this blog has a decent following. It occurred to me that blogging on other sites might also benefit the sites I visit, because I'd be sending my regular visitors to new blogs. So instead of imposing, it would be more like win-win.

So, mostly to see if I could do it, I asked the blogosphere if anyone wanted to host me during. The amount of responses surprised me, and I easily had enough requests to fill every day in March.

Then it became a question of organization and time management. Who wanted what from me, and when would it be posted?

I'm awful at time management and organization. But whenever I did a guest blog, I asked for the blogger to email me the URL the morning it was posted. That way, even if I forgot what I was doing (which was often) I would get a reminder of who to link to. Google Alerts also helped, every day sending me an email of all of the places I was currently being featured on.

I've gotten over 30 reviews so far. As I'd requested, many of the reviewers posted their reviews in multiple locations —some of them in over a dozen places. The reviews are still coming in, and I'll continue to post them as I get them.

For the curious, here's a pdf of the letter I sent to reviewers:

http://www.jakonrath.com/afraidletter.pdf

Then it became a question of checking out the blogs that asked to host me, and asking them what they'd like me to do. Some preferred interviews. Some preferred me to blog about specific topics. It took a bit of time to write the 75 posts, and I did my best to not repeat myself and to conform to the blog owner's style.

So, did it work?

Googling "Jack Kilborn" in February resulted in 2880 hits. Googling "Jack Kilborn" today results in 12,000 hits.

In February, Afraid was ranked 1,299,341 on Amazon. Currently, it's at 9565. Keep in mind this is a paperback original from a new author with a small marketing budget, so debuting in the top 10,000 is pretty good, considering no previous track record, no ads, no tour, no radio campaign, no major reviews other than Publisher's Weekly.

Three of my Jack Daniels books hit the Amazon.com Police Procedural bestseller list, at four different times during the month. My backlist numbers have all spiked considerably compared to last month.

I'm still getting requests for interviews and reviews. Plus, even though the blog tour is over, the blogs I visited are permanent, and will continue to get visitors for weeks, months, even years to come.

During my month of blog touring, I got requests for more than 600 new Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter friends. Over a hundred new people signed up for my newsletter.

So, is blog touring a good time investment?

I say yes. Many of the blogs I visited told me they were thrilled with their increased traffic, and there seemed to be a lot of cross pollenization of fans going on. In fact, except for selling short stories and visiting bookstores, I can't think of a better return on your self-promo investment than blog touring.

If you're considering doing a blog tour, here are some things to keep in mind.

1. Have copies of your book to give away, to reviewers and to contest winners. I gave away books at several of the blogs I visited.

2. Momentum is important. Hitting as many blogs as you can in a short amount of time helps build buzz. Too long between posts and people will forget you're on a blog tour.

3. Make sure you've networked with enough people to be able to find enough blogs to host you. If possible, try to appear on a variety of blogs that have different demographics.

4. Don't repeat yourself. And don't try to sell books. Blogging is about information and entertainment, not infomercials.

5. Be willing to spend a lot of time on this. I spent well over a hundred hours in March, writing blogs, answering email, figuring out what I was doing and when.

6. Use your social networks to amplify the tour. I used Twitter, Facebook, and MySpace to point people toward my blog, and many of the hits I got came from these online billboards.

7. Partner with your publisher. Grand Central has been great, helping with reviews and logistics, and coming up with many terrific ideas, including offering Afraid as an **ebook download for only $1.99.** These are savvy folks who know what they're doing, and they're a pleasure to work alongside.

Blog touring isn't easy, but I expect to see more and more authors giving it a try. Your results may vary, but like all self-promotion, the more you put into it, the more you get out of it.

More Afraid reviews:

http://scottishchick.livejournal.com/88431.html

http://guitar6.com/saviourmachine/viewtopic.php?p=22571#22571

http://authorfriendly.wordpress.com/2009/03/30/afraid-i-liked-it-a-review-of-jack-kilborns-afraid/

An Afraid book giveaway:

http://sweeps4bloggers.blogspot.com/2009/03/afraid-by-jack-kilborn-giveaway-ends.html

11 comments

Obsession, Reviews, and the Afraid Tour

In some circles, I'm known to be a little over-zealous when it comes to self-promotion.

In other circles, I'm known to be a lot over-zealous.

Any first year psychology student could pinpoint the root of my zealotry simply by spending three minutes reading my blog. It can be broken down thusly:

1. Joe spends 12 years trying to get published, writing nine unsold novels and getting over 500 rejections.

2. Joe finally gets published, fulfilling a life-long dream.

3. Joe is determined to do everything within his power to make sure he stays published.

Now, while I can't vouch for how obsessive behavior leads to happiness, or if it's good for a person's mental health, I can say that it certainly helps a guy get a lot of stuff done.

If you look at wildly successful people, they are all, to some degree, obsessive about becoming successful. I'd go so far as to say they all share some similar traits:

1. They're hard workers.
2. They're innovators.
3. They make sacrifices to reach their goals.
4. They rely on themselves.

There are other traits, I'm sure, but these four seem to be common with obsessive types.

Bringing the topic back to me, since it's my blog, I just finished an OCD blog tour, appearing on over a hundred blogs in March.

I also asked for, and received, over a hundred reviews. If you have read Afraid, and haven't reviewed it yet, please do so. I'm thanking everyone who sends me a link to their review in the acknowledgments of the next Jack Kilborn novel. The one with the most reviews posted will have a character named after them.

There are plenty of places online to review books. Here's a **list.**

For my next obsessive act, I'm going to start visiting bookstores.

Yes, for the first time in three years, I will do a Big Tour.

My goal is to visit 200 bookstores between April 12th and May 12th.

These won't be official signings. These will be drop-ins, where I sign stock, meet the booksellers, and get on my way. If you've been following my blog for a while, you may remember I did something like this before. Here's the **link.**

Which brings me to my next request:

Do you want to meet Joe Konrath, and do you have a spare bedroom?

If you answered "yes" to the above question, do you want to invite this famous author into your house for the night and treat him to dinner in exchange for scintillating conversation and free books?

I'll be posting the tour stops very soon. For sure, I'll be visiting Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Lexington, Nashville, Atlanta, and several cities in Florida. Depending on the stars aligning, I'll also be visiting several other cities and states as well.

Now, I urge you not to get super excited that I'll be visiting your town and perhaps stopping by your house. I need several days to plan this tour and figure out the best route.

Until then, please buy a copy of Afraid if you haven't already. And if you want me to sign it, today I'll be at the Waldenbooks in Peru, IL, from 2pm-4pm. Their number is 815-223-4910. If you miss me there, they'll have signed copies off all my books available for you to purchase and resell on eBay.

Hope to see some of you today, or on the road.

Giddyup...

8 comments

The Kilborn 200: Touring For Afraid

I'm touring the country again.

I will be dropping in a minimum of 200 bookstores, from April 14 until May 14, signing copies of Afraid in the following cities:

Indianapolis, IN
Cincinnati, OH
Louisville, KY
Nashville, TN
Atlanta, GA
Tampa, FL
Orlando, FL
Jacksonville, FL
Savannah, GA
Columbia, SC
Asheville, NC
Richmond, VA
Washington DC
Baltimore, MD
Pittsburgh, PA
Cleveland, OH
Detroit, MI
Milwaukee, WI
Chicago, IL

I'm humbly asking my fans, peers, and curious onlookers to give me shelter for the night.

If you have a spare bedroom, and you live in one of these towns, and you get your spouse's permission, I'd love to stay in your humble home as opposed to a cheap motel.

Email me if you'd like to put me up for the night. Keep in mind that the date has to be somewhat flexible, because the last time I did a tour like this I wound up getting delayed in various states, which threw off the whole schedule. I anticipate similar delays with this tour.

What's in it for you: A free signed book, scintillating conversation with a semi-famous author, and a signed piece of paper that says JA KONRATH/JACK KILBORN SLEPT HERE, suitable for framing, if you're into framing signed pieces of paper.

If you throw in dinner, I'll give you two signed books.

Now let us commence with the Q & A.

Q: So you're really asking people to stay at their houses on tour?

A: Yes. I've **done this before**, and it worked well. I only have limited touring dollars, and this is the best way to stretch a buck.

Q: I want to see you on tour and get some books signed. Do you have any scheduled tour times?

A: Nope. The only time and place I've specifically pinned down is April 23-26. I'll be in Orlando, at the **Romantic Times Convention**. Because this is a driving tour where I'm stopping in bookstores to sign stock, I have no clear idea when I'll visit a certain bookstores, or even if I'll be able to visit all the ones on my list. I'd hate to have a loyal fan camped out in a bookstore parking lot for three days just so I can sign their book.

Q: But I really want to meet you.

A: I want to meet you, too. But this tour doesn't have any scheduled stops. If you really want to meet me, you can always invite me over.

Q: What bookstores are on your list?

A: I'm still putting the list together. It will be many of the bookstores I've visited in the past.

Q: You're doing a lot of self-promotion on your blog, lately. When are you going to go back to posting advice and tips?

A: If you're a writer, the self-promotion I'm currently doing is actual advice and tips in action. I'll be posting regular tour updates, so both writers and fans can follow what I'm doing.

Q: You're linking to a lot of Afraid reviews, including bad ones. Why link to people who didn't like the book?

A: Everyone has an opinion, and all opinions are valid. I believe all reviews, even bad ones, have the potential to ensnare curious readers.

Q: I saw copies of Afraid at Walmart. Will you be signing stock at Walmart?

A: No. I'm only dropping in bookstores.

Q: I'm a bookseller and I want you to stop by my store. How do I get you to come?

A: Email me. If you're a bit out of the way from the cites I posted, you can entice me by saying things like, "I know you'll be in Cincinnati but my store is 50 miles away, but if you stop by I'll make sure I have 80 copies of your books for you to sign that I promise to handsell." That will lure me to your store. Also, I'll be giving booksellers free copies of Afraid. My publisher, Grand Central, is supplying me with a bunch to give-away, and they're also partially funding the tour.

Q: Don't you ever sleep?

A: I'll sleep when I'm dead.

23 comments

Afraid Tour Day 13

I write this as the guest of wonderful hosts and writers **Jeff Strand** and **Lynne Hansen**, whom you all should be reading. Great authors, and great people.

AFRAID seems to be doing well, and word of mouth continues to spread. If you've read the book but haven't reviewed it somewhere online, I heartily encourage you to do so.

This is also the last two days to get the AFRAID ebook for only $1.99, available everywhere ebooks are sold, in a variety of ebook formats. The sale ends when April does.

If you're one of the several hundred thousand people who own an Amazon Kindle, you might also want to check out the other books I've made available for that particular reading device. Cheap, too.

Joe's Kindle Books

When the tour ends, mid May, I'll devote several blog posts to the ebook phenomenon, and my ebook experiments, including Tequila for Sheila, the Kindle, Afraid, and the free ebooks available on my website. In a nutshell: this is the future, and money can be made.

Current tour stats:

Miles driven: 2865
Bookstores visited: 123
Books signed: 888
States traversed: 7
Days on the road: 13
Nights in hotels: 5

The "nights in hotels" stat would be smaller, but it was easier to stay at the conference hotel during the Romantic Times Convention than shlup back and forth.

RT was impressive. Several thousand readers attended, everyone was friendly, and I gave away and/or sold hundreds of books. I hung out with too many cool people to mention them all by name, but the networking and schmoozing was just as valuable as meeting old and new fans. I'll be back next year.

Joe's Tour Tips:

If you're thinking about doing a Drive By Tour, here are some quick suggestions:

*Get a GPS and a 3G phone with Google Maps. There is limited WiFi on the road, but you should be able to locate most of the bookstores with these two gadgets. Call first to make sure the store still exists, as many have gone the way of the dinosaur.

*If you run out of clothes, it's faster and easier to buy new socks and underwear than it is to take two hours to stop and wash them. Of course, if you're staying with a friend or fan, ask to use their washer and dryer. In a pinch, wearing your socks in the shower and then blow drying them gets them clean enough.

*Giving away free books is a good way to recruit booksellers into your ever-expanding sales force. If your publisher doesn't supply them, buy them yourself to give away. Ask them to post reviews if they like it. Buy books from a bookseller at their discount (many will do this for you if you're friends) because then these go toward your royalties and sales figures.

*Staying with family, friends, and fans, really cuts down on expenses. Not only will they save you the cost of a hotel, but many of them feed you. In fact, Lynne Hansen made what might have been one of the best lasagnas I've ever had. Which brings me to my next valuable tip:

*When you're in Florida, stay with Lynne Hansen and Jeff Strand.

*Having a case of water and a bag of fruit in the car keeps you hydrated, staves off hunger, and requires less frequent (and expensive) stops for food and drink.

*Realize that not all booksellers will be happy to see you. In fact, some may be downright hostile.

Real life example, from yesterday.

Our hero (me), weary from a 13 hour day signing stock along Florida's west coast, comes upon his final stop of the day.

My protocol is always the same:

1. Find books on shelf.
2. Bring them over to a bookseller.
3. Ask to say hello to a manager while signing them.

I won't mention the name of the store, but I have signed at well over 300 stores from this particular chain. The overwhelming majority are happy to see me.

The manager at this store, a scowling woman named Sylvia, was not.

Joe: (smiling) Hi, I'm an author, breezing through town and...

Sylvia: (scowling) You signed those? Are you buying them?

Joe: Excuse me?

Sylvia: You can't just sign books. If you sign them, I can't return them.

Joe: Uh, actually you can.

Sylvia: Now I'm stuck with them. Do you know how many signed books I've gotten stuck with?

Joe: (still smiling) These can be returned. You just strip off the cover if you want to return them. But the point of signing them is because they sell better than unsigned...

Sylvia: You can't just come in here and sign books. Now what am I supposed to do with these?

Joe: Uh, sell them?

(Sylvia frowns even deeper. I look around to the other booksellers for support, and see all of them cowering.)

Sylvia: I've got a whole back room filled with signed books.

Joe: (still smiling, but it's getting tough) You do see the "Autographed Copy" stickers on the cover, right? These are from your chain. In fact, I picked them up at another one of your stores less than an hour ago, because they gave me extras. The fact that your chain has stickers expressly so authors can...

Sylvia: Where did you sign them? (she flips open one of my books, scowling)

Joe: Usually booksellers are happy to see me.

Sylvia: You can't sign anything unless I get approval from the corporate office. What am I supposed to do with these?

Joe: I'm, frankly, flabbergasted. And that's not easy to do to me.

Sylvia: Don't sign anything else. (walks away)

Now, this exchange caught me completely off guard, especially late in the day when I was exhausted. But it is important to point out a few things:

1. Sylvia is lying. Paperbacks are always returnable. You strip off the cover, and send that back for full credit. Signing the book doesn't inhibit returnability.

2. A bookseller doesn't need corporate approval to have an author sign stock already available on the shelves. Ever. That's why they have "Autographed Copy" stickers.

3. If Sylvia has a back room full of signed books (unlikely, because even signed hardcovers and trade paperbacks are returnable, unless they are POD), maybe she'd be able to sell a few if they were ON THE SALES FLOOR AND NOT IN A BACK ROOM.

4. It's a bad policy to be rude to anyone, ever. Especially in retail. Especially to an author who could call up their DM and their corporate office and his publisher and complain like crazy.

Of course, I didn't call up anyone. Unhappy people are their own hell, and I feel no need to add to their misery.

Also, when she said, "Don't sign anything else" I wondered, and still wonder, what she meant by that. Was I going to start grabbing books by other authors and signing them? Or did I somehow tap into the woman's greatest fear, having a bookstore filled with signed books?

So, how did our hero deal with this crazy woman? I thanked her for her time, picked up all of my books, and bought them myself. Because there was no way I was leaving them in this lunatic's store.

I also apologized the employee at the cash register, who looked somewhere between sympathetic and terrified.

Now some may think the moral to this story is to ask permission before you sign anything. I'm of the "it's better to apologize than ask permission" school, especially since I've signed at well over 1500 bookstores and have only encountered loonies like this three or four times.

No, the actual moral to this story is: You can't please everyone.

Get used to it. Some people won't like you, your books, or the fact that you're a successful author and they hate their jobs.

While it isn't pleasant to have a bookseller (99.9% of whom are wonderful people whom I love like family) scowling and berating you, it is a good reminder that there are crazy, hostile people in the world. They make life a little more interesting, and you can't dwell on it for any longer than it takes to blog about it.

Nuff said.

On the other end of the spectrum, I've met dozens of booksellers on this tour who were eager to see me. Some remembered me from my previous tour. Some are fans. A few broke out the cameras and I posed for some pics and signed books for them.

Kilborn 200 Tour Wrap Up

I left on the Jack Kilborn Afraid Tour on April 17, and came back on May 10.

Here are the final stats:

Days on tour: 23
Miles driven: 5789
Bookstores visited: 206
Books signed: 1515
Books given away: 580 (this includes two conventions)
States traversed: 12 + Washington DC
Nights in hotels: 6
Gas cost: $593.65
Hotel cost: $400.22
Tolls and Parking cost: $68.00
Food cost: $130.64
Total tour cost: $1192.51

These fine people allowed me to stay with them while on tour:

William Berger
Rob Swartwood
Steve Lukac
Jennifer & James Daniel Ross
Sherrill & Barry Bland
Jeff & Janice Strand
Cynthia & Bill Johnson
Jane & Don Bretl
Rhonda & Randy White
And especially my pal, Jim Coursey

The tour would have been quicker, but I had to do two events, the Romantic Times Convention in Orlando which ate up three days, and the Reaching Forward library conference which ate up two and a half days.

Is it all worth it?

Unfortunately, yes.

I say "unfortunately" because touring like this ain't easy. But having a publisher behind me and fans/peers who were willing to put me up for the night (and often buy me dinner/breakfast) made it cheaper and easier than it would have been had I done it without this sort of support.

These are the reasons it is worthwhile:

1. Meeting Booksellers. I met well over 500, and a bunch of them got free copies of my books (graciously supplied by my publisher.) Many of these booksellers will read the books I gave them, which makes them much easier to handsell. I also encouraged booksellers to post reviews of AFRAID on the Internet, and many of them already have.

2. Signing Stock. Signed books tend to sell better than unsigned books for two reasons. First, there's an added value to a signed book. Second, because signed books are often displayed face-out, which sells more books.

3. Long-term Effects. While short-term sales are nice, the long-term benefits are better. Books that sell well in a bookstore are automatically re-ordered (or are manually re-ordered by the bookseller) which leads to the store automatically keeping copies on the shelves. Down the road, this means royalty checks and an ever-increasing group of readers exposed to your books. It also doesn't hurt to show your publisher that you are working your butt off for them, especially since we're in a recession. There's also some publicity to be had in doing a tour like this, and it makes a good talking point for interviews and a good bit for the bio.

If you want to do a tour like this, some things to think about:

1. Plan ahead. Select bookstore-rich locations where you'll get the most bang for your buck.

2. Use your friends. The more people you can hook up with on the road, the cheaper and easier it is.

3. Priceline.com and Expedia.com. When you don't have any friends in a certain town, use the Internet to get the cheapest hotel rates.

4. Involve your publisher. You may not get any $$$ to tour, or any free books to give away, but keeping your publisher informed, and getting whatever help you can from them, is win-win.

5. Get a GPS and a smartphone with Google Maps. Often, doing a stock-signing tour takes you in directions you hadn't forseen. A current GPS and a phone (or Blackberry, laptop, etc) with Google Maps lets you find bookstores in your current area or on your route.

6. Eat on the road. It isn't the healthiest way to tour (unless you're Barry Eisler, who stops daily at Whole Foods while on tour and stocks up on nutritious stuff) but it will allow you to get more done. Keep a case of water and some snacks in the car with you.

7. Read my blog. That may seem redundant, since you're already reading my blog, but I've done two of these giant tours, and everything I've learned is in this blog. Read up so you can repeat my successes and avoid my failures.

While the Afraid Tour is over, I won't stop promoting Afraid. My new Jack Daniels paperback, Fuzzy Navel, comes out next week, and I'll be visiting many bookstores in Illinois, Wisconsin, Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana to support it. Naturually, I'll also be supporting Afraid. Ditto in July, when Cherry Bomb comes out in hardcover.

Touring isn't just for when your book is released. It's perpetual. If your books are on the bookself, signing them and meeting the bookseller is a no-brainer, even if the books have been out for a few years.

Besides Internet promotion, stock-signing is one of the most cost-effective ways to promote. As I said, it isn't easy, but what worthwhile things in life are? I've found that the most difficult and challenging things are the most rewarding.

Of course, a lot of people also say I'm nuts. But they've said that about a lot of forward-thinking people, like Caligula, and DeSade.

peers

3... 2... 1... Contacts

Let's talk about networking and schmoozing.

There's a difference. Networking involves staying in touch with your peers, knowing who is doing what, trading industry buzz and leads and ideas.

Conferences and email are the preferred places to network. Gabbing online, or grabbing a beer and talking shop, will help you learn about the business vicariously —-their experience becomes your experience. Writing is a solitary profession, and you should embrace every opportunity to compare notes.

Then, if a peer is putting together a conference, or editing an anthology, or gathering a line-up of authors at the local library, they'll (hopefully) keep you in mind, and you'll do the same.

Schmoozing is slightly different. Agents, editors, booksellers, sales reps, the media, and authors higher up on the food chain are prime targets for schmoozing. The reason is simple: They can do something for you.

Unlike networking, which is based on camaraderie, schmoozing is based on business relationships. The point is to present yourself as likeable, easy to work with, and professional. It isn't necessary to impress your peers. But impressing an editor, or your publisher's sales force, or a chain bookstore buyer, is something that can help you immeasurably.

Hopefully, most of us have reached adulthood with a sense of how to interact with others. But I'm still surprised by how many authors don't have social skills to match their talents. Sometimes it's shyness. Sometimes it's pomposity. Sometimes it's being oblivious. So let's do a quick Personal Interaction 101 refresher.

- Handshake should be firm and quick.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Smile.
- Listening has more power than talking.
- Posture shows interest.
- Compliments, flattery, and flirting in moderation.
- Asking questions gets more people to like you than stating opinions.
- Being funny is a plus.
- Decent clothes, fresh breath, good grooming.
- Remembering names and faces is important.
- Be confident, not cocky.
- Don't monopolize the conversation.
- No one knows you're shy, so it's easy to fake confidence.
- Pay attention to people's reactions.
- Be genuine, be enthusiastic, be nice, and don't overstay your welcome.

I'm sure we all already know that stuff, and probably do most of it already. But it doesn't hurt to keep it in mind when you're networking, and especially when you're schmoozing.

Does this work? Absolutely. I've lost track of the number of opportunities that have fallen into my lap simply because I met so-and-so at such-and-such. I've landed events, publicity, media ops, anthologies, interviews, sales, appearances, blurbs, and so on, simply because I met someone somewhere and didn't piss them off.

I've pissed off a few as well, and while I don't recommend that as an ideal business model, I can honestly say that having detractors is a great way to get people curious about you, and if you're pleasing 100% of the people 100% of the time, you're probably amazingly boring.

On a semi-related note, if anyone is interested in arguing with me, or asking me any questions live, I'm the headliner in the next **Writing to Publish** chat, happening Monday, May 1, at 10pm Eastern time. You'll need AOL or AIM to join the chat (they are free to download.)

Here's the link: http://www.cuebon.com/ewriters/index.html

Hope to see some of you there!

24 comments

Peers and the Healthy Writer

I've been doing a lot of travelling lately, giving my standard inspirational talk to newbies (if you've seen my tattoos, you know the talk I mean) and a topic that keeps coming up is the importance of peers to today's writer.

Peers are both the most and least important people in your career. It all depends on what you use them for.

Here's a quickie rundown of everything peery.

Herding Instinct. If you're a newbie writer who lives a Unibomberish existence off the grid, you aren't reading this. For the rest of us, seeking out like-minded folks is part of our genetic code.

Since writing is a solitary profession, meeting other writers —both online and in real life —is a way to reassure ourselves that we're normal after all. Most writers have the same concerns, problems, and fears. Depending on your experience, there's always more to learn and tales to share.

This is good. Networking offers opportunities to question, evaluate, test, and explore the reasons we work the way we work. We all can learn a great deal from each other, and Internet forums, blogs, bulletin boards, groups, and discussions, along with writing conventions and conferences, book fairs, and literary festivals, are the perfect way to do this.

You obviously read this blog, but do you contribute to it? Do you ask questions, offer advice, and communicate? Communication is a two way street, and you learn more from give and take than you do simply lurking and watching.

Critiquing. While trading insider secrets is a great reason to hang out with other writers, the best way to use your peers is as readers. If you haven't ever joined a writer's group, you should consider it. If you're already published, offer to trade manuscripts with your peers before your agent or editor has a look. I do this with many different authors, and I always learn a lot.

While it's always nice to be praised, it's much better to seek problems with your work, so those can be fixed before the book reaches the street and the hate email starts pouring in.

Critiquing goes both ways, and you can also learn from reading a peer's manuscript and articulating what can be made stronger, and possibly how.

Approval. While I endorse forging some ties with a few close writing friends, for the most part you don't need to worry about the acceptance of your peers. While a certain percentage of them —especially if you do a lot of appearances —will buy your books if they like what you have to say, the fact is that your peers aren't your main audience.

Worrying about who is saying what about whom, feeling snubbed because you never got that nomination or award, and wondering why those cliques of popular authors never seem to include you —that's all wasted effort on your part.

You don't need to be accepted by the writing community, the genre community, the awards committee, your local writing organization, or any other group of individual in order to be happy or successful. The opinion of your peers, as a group, simply doesn't matter.

High school was a long time ago. If you like yourself, and have at least one person in the world who also likes you, that's all you'll ever need.

Blurbing. Try to blurb everyone you can. When asking for blurbs, don't be aggressive, or disappointed if it doesn't work out. That's all that needs to be said on the subject.

For an alternate viewpoint of this, check out Barry Eisler's blog post over at MJ Rose's Buzz, Balls, and Hype:

http://mjroseblog.typepad.com/buzz_balls_hype/2006/09/blurbersion.html

Commiseration. Hanging out with writers, talking the talk, is always helpful. But sometimes you need something deeper. Things happen in the career, both good and bad, and often we don't know how to react to them. Sometimes we need a peer to offer their perspective. Sometimes we just need someone to bitch to.

This is where the line between peer and friend begins to blur. Try to keep them separate.

A peer is a fellow writer.

A friend is a favored companion.

All peers are not friends, and all friends are not peers.

If you can land one who is both, cherish that relationship, because you can benefit greatly from it. Just remember to put back in what you take out.

And remember to never air dirty laundry, yours or anyone else's.

Advice. As you move up in the writing world, more and more people will ask you for your advice because they want to get where you're at.

Offer that advice, but always make sure they know that your way isn't the only way, and that just because you're a so-called expert doesn't mean you know everything.

And make sure, when you hear expert advice, you remember that as well.

There are few universal truths in writing. Learn what you can, test things for yourself, and discard what doesn't work.

Support. We need to help each other, not hurt each other.

That involves two basic principles.

1. Not thinking or acting like you're better than anyone else, and never publicly criticizing other authors.

2. Being friendly, accessible, and professional.

Treat other writers like you want to be treated, no matter their experience level, or how incredibly obnoxious, small-minded, or oblivious they are.

Being right is not an excuse for being mean. Being successful is not an excuse for being self-important. Being honest is not an invitation to getting attacked.

Help others and keep the negativity private.

That said, I've officially declared tomorrow, May 3 ,to be "Hug Another Author Day."

Tag, you're it. Spread the word. Virtual hugs are okay too.

And, as always, thanks for reading. Hugs to all you folks. :)

19 comments

Escaping The Vacuum

My mom has said on more than one occassion that when I was growing up she didn't know if I had the biggest ego in the universe or no ego at all.

I think that's a trait many writers share.

On one hand, we have the hubris that our words are not only important enough to put on paper, but that other people should take time to read them.

On the other hand, we are constantly in fear that we suck hard.

Unlike stage actors or musicians, where feedback is live in front of a group of people, writers get very little in the way of approval from their audience.

Sure, there are reviews. And if we're lucky enough to get published, there can be fan mail. But during the months it takes to write a book, we're usually working in a vacuum. The writing process is solitary, and feedback is often internal and fiercely critical.

This lack of confidence in our own abilities makes us work harder to make the book better, but it also causes a lot of worry and stress. We all face a perpetual teeter-totter of thinking what we just wrote is pretty good, then thinking it will never be published and the world will realize we're frauds.

But it doesn't have to be that way.

I've extolled the value of peer groups in the past. Having friends, family, and peers critique your writing is the fastest way to improve. But it works for more than the finished story.

Asking a trusted peer to read a work-in-progress can be a huge help. It can clear up nagging doubts, get you through a part where you're stuck, force you to regroup, and aid in motivation. A writer friend saying "This is great" ranks only below "I love you" in the most important words you can hear.

I'm lucky that I have half a dozen professional writers on speed dial, and if I get stuck, they're happy to help me out. Naturually, I return the favor. It's a combination of tough love, enabling, and a mutual admiration society, and it is one of the true joys of this business.

Don't have anyone to help you when you're wallowing in despair? Here are some tips to find that special someone.

- Join a writer's group. Most colleges, libraries, and bookstores have some sort of weekly or monthly gathering of writers. If they don't, offer to start one.
- Next time you're among writers (convention, conference, writing class, literary talk) introduce yourself to them. If you find someone with similar interests, offer to trade manuscripts.
- If you're a published writer, and have published writer friends (you can meet them at book fairs and writing conventions, usually at the bar), ask if they'll swap WIPs with you.
- Show your non-writer friends to critique like a writer. I have a download on my website that teaches how.

Book don't have to be written in a vacuum. Talking with peers can be encouraging and inspiring, even if it only amounts to a few kind words to help you trust yourself.

18 comments

Be the Bra

I'm writing this as my Amazon Shorts download **FOUR PACK OF JACK** sits comfortably at the #10 spot in the Amazon ranking for shorts.

It had briefly made it up to #6, and considering I don't have a new book out, and I haven't spread the word through my newsletter yet, I'm pretty impressed by the number of people who bought it in the three days it has been live.

Thanks for your support!

Which brings up the topic of today's blog: Supporting your fellow authors.

Like most people in this business, money in my household is tight. Being paid in sporadic big chunks means our family has to carefully budget, and the amount of money I spend on self-promotion is staggering (you can read about it in the current issue of Forbes) and I usually go overboard.

But I have a cardinal rule that I always try to maintain. When possible, I buy the books of my peers.

I've never asked for a blurb without owning every book the author has written (or at least those still in print.)

I buy every book by Tess Gerritsen, Anne Fraiser, Alex Kava, Julia-Spencer Fleming, MJ Rose, David Morrell, Lee Child, Gayle Lynds, Ridley Pearson, Andrew Vachss, Michael Prescott, George Chesbro, Warren Murphy, David Wiltse, Robert Walker, Barry Eisler, David Ellis, PJ Parrish, William Kent Krueger, James Born, Barb D'Amato, Libby Fisher Hellmann, Steve Alten, James Rollins, Jay Bonansinga, Jack Kerley, Bill Fitzhugh, F. Paul Wilson, Rob Kantner, Steve Spruill, Rick Hautala, and Raymond Benson —-not just because they are wonderful writers, but because they've blurbed me.

Buying them is the least I could do. They generously gave of their time, and according to the laws of karma I need to give back when I can. Not only to them, but to the world. Which is one of the reasons I blurbed over 30 books last year.

Very recently, space considerations forced me to get rid of some of my books (I have a library of over 5000.) But as I perused my shelves looking for what is donatable to the local thrift store, I made a shocking discovery.

I have over 450 signed books from authors I've met. A few of these were given to me, and some were traded for signed copies of my books, but 85% of them were bought, by me.

I don't remember buying most of these. I certainly haven't read most of these. Some aren't the type of genre I like, and some don't seem the least bit interesting to me. But I bought them anyway, to support my peers.

As Tom Waits said, we're chained to the world, and we all gotta pull.

Though I've blocked these many purchases from my mind as incidental, three events do stand out from the years I've been an author.

Once, at a library event, an eager POD author came up to my table and plunked down money for my book, and then showed me her book. It didn't look like anything I'd ever read, and didn't look appealing at all, even by POD standards. I congratulated her for writing a book, thanked her for buying mine, wished her much success, but *didn't buy her book.*

I've bought dozens of POD books from authors I've done events with, books that I never read. But for some reason I didn't buy hers, and it has stuck in my mind as a major regret years later.

Another mind-sticky event happened during my tour last year. I did a signing with a famous author (let's call him Jasper Fforde) who had a huge line of fans compared to my tiny line. I did my book-talk and managed to sell a few books to his sloppy seconds, but not nearly the large pile that he did. We spoke a little, between him signing copies, and he seemed a nice enough bloke.

I bought a copy of his hardcover because that's what I usually do when I'm at a signing with another author. (My other cardinal rule is: Whenever I do a signing at an independent bookstore, I buy a book to show my support for the store.)

Mr. Fforde did not buy a copy of mine. Not even a paperback.

Should that have bothered me? Perhaps not. But it does.

The last one that I'll always remember was at the Magna Cum Murder convention in Indiana. I was schmoozing the book table and who approached but none other then bestselling author Alexander McCall Smith, of The Number One Ladies' Detective Agency fame. He's sold more books than everyone else I know put together, and I know some famous people.

We got to talking, exchanged a few jokes and pleasantries, and he asked if I had any books for sale. I pointed out WHISKEY SOUR and pitched him the serial killer plot, ending my speil with, "It's exactly the polar opposite of the gentle, humorous stories that you write." That was my way of saying that I in no way expected him to buy a copy, because I knew he'd dislike it.

He bought a copy anyway. Thanks again, Mr. Smith.

Naturally, I already owned a copy of his book.

Which brings this full circle. Whenever I do a library panel, or a conference, or a multiple author signing, I try to buy the books of my fellow authors. Especially if they buy my book.

Often, I'll trade copies, which is fine, but it isn't the same as plunking down the cash and supporting my peers with that miniscule royalty and tiny blip in their sales figures.

I've noticed that I've extended this show of support to many of the blogs I visit. If I find myself posting on someone's blog often, and I haven't checked out their books, I'll pick up one or two.

I'm also known to pop on over to Amazon and do reviews of many of my peers' books. Not because they ask me to. But because I want to show support.

Is this a subtle message to everyone who reads this blog to get your asses over to Amazon.com/shorts and buy **FOUR PACK OF JACK**?

Hell no. I don't think this message is subtle at all.

SUPPORT ME! I'M WORTH THE 49 CRUMMY CENTS!

And not only me. Support each other. We're in this together, folks.

Also, if any of you are named "Joe" and would like to buy a personalized copy of "The Big Over Easy" by Jasper Fforde, I have one for sale. Cheap.

36 comments

Blurbs 101

Blurbs are favorable quotes from other authors about your book.

What works? What should be avoided? How can a new author get the blurbs that the marketing department craves without insulting, embarassing, or annoying potential blurbers?

Like many other aspects of this business, it's a tightrope. Being too pushy is bad. But having no blurbs is also bad. And your publisher will put much of the burden of securing blurbs in your corner.

Having good blurbs can improve your reputation within a publishing house, and get sales and marketing to rally around you. Publishers believe that blurbs sell books. If you get some good ones, it can only help your cause.

I procured 20 blurbs for WHISKEY SOUR, from assorted award-winning and bestselling authors in the mystery genre, and I've gotten a handful so far for BLOODY MARY. Here are some dos and don'ts I've learned.

- DO contact your favorite authors. Email, or personal letters, work well. Express an appreciation for their work (which means you'd better be a fan and have read their stuff). Explain that you're a new writer, and that your publisher is seeking blurbs, and that you'd be thrilled if you could have your publisher send a book to them.

- DON'T offer to send the book on your own, unless you know the author. Some authors don't like to give out their address, understandably so. Offering to have your publisher send it to their editor is a better way to do it.

- DO meet you favorite authors when they're signing, or at a conference. Explaining that you're a writer, and that you're a huge fan, is something authors like to hear.

- DO email authors that you've met before. You have a better chance of getting a blurb from someone who remembers you.

- DON'T ask for a blurb in person, or in a public forum. It makes some authors uncomfortable, and puts them in a position where they must make a decision, and neither is good. Saying no will make them look bad, and saying yes will open up the floodgates for everyone to come rushing in and ask the same question. Unless you know the author pretty well, it's best to request a blurb privately, through email.

- DO follow up on 'yes' and 'maybe' answers to your request. Many authors might like to help, but need a few weeks or months to get to you. Some may agree to blurb you, but their schedules won't let them. This is a business of deadlines, travelling, and lots of things happening at once —-which means you can be easily forgotten. Go ahead and send an email after a few weeks, asking if they had a chance to

read your book yet.

- DON'T badger, harass, or repeatedly email an author, even if the author said yes. Time gets away from all of us, and sometimes good intentions fall flat. You can't blame someone for not helping you, and to get angry or hold grudges is wrong.

- DO leave the author an 'out' in your email; a way of gracefully declining your request. "I understand if you're too busy" works fine.

- DO be grateful to the folks that blurb you. Thank them. Recommend their books to friends and family. Link to them on your website. Send them a copy of your book with their blurb on it. A blurb is a gift. Treat it as such.

Asking for blurbs isn't easy. Being shy and tentative doesn't work. You should be bold, but not pushy. You should also be genuine. I've gotten blurbs from folks who routinely refuse to blurb, because they respected my approach.

I've also pissed some people off.

It's never my intent to piss someone off —-after all, I only approach authors that I respect and enjoy, and I try to treat people like I like to be treated. I'd never say anything to someone that I wouldn't mind being said to me.

Which reminds me of an old story, about the guy who went up to every woman in a bar and asked them if they'd like to sleep with him. He got slapped a lot. But he also got lucky a lot.

You lose some, you win some. Be yourself, try your best, and remember to be generous with your time when new authors approach you for blurbs —-and they will. Trust me.

A Fistful of Blurbs

I just saw a few copies of my newest paperback (Rusty Nail) in a bookstore, and did the standard author thing of picking them up and fondling them while grinning like an idiot. While fondling, I was stuck with a powerful emotion:

I'm the luckiest damn person on the planet.

I felt this because I'm living my dream, and because I'm well published by a smart publisher who knows what they're doing.

But I also felt this because on the cover, above the title, is this quote:

"Thrills, chills, and laugh-out-loud hilarity... Konrath expertly pours on both shivers and fun." - Tess Gerristsen.

I'm thrilled to get this blurb. Not because Tess is a NYT Bestselling author (though that doesn't hurt.) But because Tess is a stellar writer, and I've admired her work for a decade. Having met Tess, I can vouch that she's every bit as cool in person as she is in print. Having her name on my book makes me feel all kinds of cool.

But my happiness gets even happier. If you buy Rusty Nail (and you should) and open the cover you'll find wonderful blurbs by authors Anne Frasier, Alex Kava, Julia Spencer-Fleming, Gayle Lynds, William Kent Krueger, Jack Kerley, PJ Parrish, James Rollins, and Ridley Pearson. Plus favorable snippets from Booklist, Library Journal, PW, and the Midwest Book review.

If you happen to run into a paperback of Bloody Mary, on the cover you'll see this terrific blurb:

"Excellent smart-mouth thrills... my advice: Take an long sip." - Lee Child.

Thanks, Lee!

You'll also see praise from authors James O. Born, Blake Crouch, Bill Fitzhugh, David Morrell, Barara D'Amato, and MJ Rose.

If you move on the the PB of Whiskey Sour, on the cover you'll see the quote:

"Whiskey Sour is the best debut of the year." - Chicago Sun-Times (which is uber-critic David Montgomery)

There are also blurbs from Jay Bonansinga, Raymond Benson, Robert W. Walker, George C. Chesbro, F. Paul Wilson, Steve Alten, David Wiltse, Libby Fischer Hellmann, Andrew Vachss, Barry Eisler, Eric Garcia, Warren B. Murphy, and David Ellis.

Which means I've had 30 writers say nice things about me. That's thirty-one if you count Kay Hooper's remarks about Dirty Martini:

"It's difficult as hell to balance wit with suspense and horrific violence with humor, but JA Konrath manages the feat deftly in his "Jacqueline 'Jack' Daniels" series of thrillers. Jack is a smart, sexy cop with a rocky personal life and a career that pits her strength and skill against the worst kind of evil – and she not only triumphs but does so with humor and style. Spend some time with Jack and the people in her life; I can promise you won't regret it."

So I've been extremely lucky when it comes to getting blurbs.

Naturally, I also try to return the favor.

Perusing the mystery section of the bookstore, I found eight books with my blurbs on either the front or back cover, and another four with quotes from me inside them.

Though I'm waaaay behind on my blurbs (I have a TBR pile the height of my desk) I still try my best to blurb everyone who asks. I went into a lot of detail about blurbing on a previous blog post (http://jakonrath.blogspot.com/2006/02/secret-world-of-blurbing.html) and I don't want to repeat myself here. Suffice to say, both getting and giving blurbs is an important part of the publishing business.

We all should remember that.

20 comments

The Secret World of Blurbing

I blurb a lot of books.

I do this for three main reasons.

1. A lot of authors have blurbed me, and I feel I need to return the favor.
2. I know how hard it is for new authors, and I want to help.
3. It can't hurt having my name on millions of covers.

It isn't easy to solicit blurbs, even though it is on the author's shoulders to do so. I've been turned down many times (sometimes in a very mean-spirited way,) but I've also managed to snag a few dozen blurbs from well-known, and bestselling, authors.

I've personally blurbed over fifty books. Does that make me a blurb-whore? How important are blurbs anyway? Do they work? Do authors really read the whole book before they blurb? Do they blurb books that suck? Do they exaggerate? Do they lie? How do you turn down a request for blurbs?

I have an article about how to solicit blurbs on the TIPS pages of my **website** called **Blurbs 101**. If you're looking to get blurbs, I explain how.

For this blog entry I'd like to talk about it from the blurber's POV, rather than the blurbee's.

So now, in the interest of full disclosure, I will make myself a pariah in the publishing world. I will truthfully answer what no other author will dare answer, and it will probably come back to haunt me.

I'm going to tell the truth, even though it makes the industry, and me, look bad...

(Did you get tingles reading that? I did.)

- **Did you ever blurb a book you didn't read?**

I try to read every book from beginning to end, even though I know for a fact that many authors will blurb something they haven't read. Sometimes all they'll read is the back jacket copy. I can't really blame those authors for that —-it's hard to find the time, and the bigger the author, the more blurb requests they receive.

But you noticed I said 'try.' Does that mean there are actually some books which I haven't read completely but still blurbed?

In the interest of full disclosure, I will say that yes, indeed, I have blurbed a few books that I wasn't able to finish because of time constraints (my deadlines vs the blurb deadline.) In that case I'll read as much as time can allow, and if I like it, I'll blurb it.

Is that wrong? Hypocritical? Unethical? Yeah, probably. But I'm man enough to admit it. Most authors do it and will never admit it. It's so well-known in the industry, that when pros ask other pros to blurb, there's an automatic assumption that the book won't be read.

Rest assured that if you're an author I've blurbed, and you're reading this, I did in fact read your entire book. :)

- **Have you ever blurbed a book you didn't like?**

No.

Well, not really.

When I teach, I'm a harsh critic. When I read, I'm pretty easy. If something was good enough to get published, then it obviously had some merit, and I can usually find that merit —-even if I have to slog through some bad prose to get to it.

I concentrate on the good, and offer a blurb based on what I liked. After all, this isn't an impartial review. This is to impress the publisher, and help the author find an audience who *does* like this sort of book.

Publishers *love* blurbs. It gets them excited and enthused. I haven't seen any hard data about whether blurbs sell books, but I know for a fact that the more blurbs you get, the happier your publisher is.

- **Have you ever given an over-enthusiastic blurb?**

Of course. That's the point. Blurbs have to be over-the-top raves, or else they have no use. Exaggeration and hyperbole are expected. Blurbs are sales pitches for someone else's work.

- **Isn't that lying? Aren't you worried that your fans will see your name on something, buy the book because of it, and then get mad at you for recommending it?**

In all honesty, I do feel I have an obligation to my fans, and that my name has some value. But I have to weigh that against authors who need help.

The author usually wins.

But before you scream at me about integrity and values, I urge you to hate the game, not the playa. This is the way the system is set up. This is how 90% of authors operate. They won't admit it. Ever. They'll take this secret knowledge to the grave with them. They won't even discuss it privately with close friends after several drinks. They'll even post responses on this blog saying I'm evil and of course they only blurb things that they truly love.

And they're lying. Except for a very select few, who don't blurb anything at all.

I hope my fans will realize that taste is subjective, and that I may like something that they may not like, but that shouldn't have any reflection on the books I write.

I really hope they realize that.

- **Do you ever turn down books for blurbs?**

Sort of. It's tough saying no to people. I know how hard this business is. But sometimes I simply don't have time to get to something, and the next thing I know the book is in print and I missed the opportunity to blurb them.

- **Have you ever missed an opportunity to blurb on purpose, because you started the book and didn't like it and were chicken to tell the author that their book was crummy?**

Yes. But in other cases, I really did run out of time.

If you're reading this, and I said I'd blurb your book but didn't, it's because I ran out of time. :)

- **Aren't you worried you'll be labeled a blurb whore like (insert big name author here)?**

If everyone knows (big name author) is a blurb whore, why does he/she keep getting blurb requests? Why is his/her name plastered on every other book?

I promised myself I'd help new writers. That means blurbing.

It also means doing a blog about the realities of blurbing.

- **Would you ever take money for blurbs?**

I've heard unconfirmed stories of bestselling authors who sell blurbs, some for as high as 50k. I wouldn't ever do this, because my goal is to help other authors, not profit from them.

Apparently even JA has a scruple or two.

- **Have you every signed your name to a blurb you didn't write?**

No. But I've seen other authors do this. They'll tell the blurbee to write a few sample blurbs, and then the blurber will pick the one to sign his name to. No kidding. I have actual proof that this happens.

I wouldn't do this. I'd also never blurb a book sight unseen. If I've blurbed the book, I have a copy of it. Some authors will give a blurb without even requesting the manuscript. I always ask for the manuscript, and always try to read the entire thing.

Again, I'm not as amoral as some blurbers out there. But remember —-their amorality is based on trying to help their fellow authors. Think gift horses and mouths.

- **Don't you think that after this blog post gets around, you'll never be asked to blurb again?**

In all honesty, I can guarantee that after this post goes live, several authors will email me, asking for blurbs.

That's just how the business works, folks.

I might lose some credibility by speaking the truth. But I might gain some credibility by speaking the truth.

The bottom line is: I'm eternally grateful to the people who have blurbed me, and will continue to support them and tout their praises because they've done me a huge favor, and I'd never dare question if they actually read my books or not.

I hope the folks I've blurbed feel the same way about me.

56 comments

More Green Eyed Monsters

See? I told you I'd get back to multiple blog entries per week.

I've blogged about the dangers of envying peers before, but I feel it's time to take a closer look at this topic.

For the uninitiated, success in this business comes largely from luck. Yes, you can write good books. Yes, you can promote like crazy. But the magic balance of the right book at the right house at the right time remains largely beyond the control of the writer.

In some cases, success if the result of hard work and talent.

In some cases, success comes when the publisher isn't expecting it.

In some cases, success comes because a few key people at the publishing house force it.

But in most cases, it's an unrepeatable combination of events that leads to a whole bunch of folks buying your book for some unforeseeable reason.

Lately, I've been watching the success of some of my peers. By success, I mean:

1. Lots of books selling.
2. More money/bigger contracts being offered.
3. More opportunities presenting themselves for more sales and more money.

Publishing mimics most other facets of life, in that the more successful you are, the more successful you are. Why this is true is beyond the scope of this blog.

What is within the scope of this blog is how we, as writers, should react when someone we know lands the big deal that we would ritually sacrifice our entire family for.

I believe that envy and jealousy are useless, because they dwell on things that have to do with other people, not with us.

Unfortunately, part of being a writer is being imaginative. It's super-easy to imagine a million dollar movie deal, a #1 bestseller slot, and a seat on Oprah (on her show, not on her personally.)

We all have the lottery dream; the huge life-changing success that transforms our lives and ourselves.

When this dream actually happens to someone we've heard of, or someone we know personally, it's a natural reaction to wonder: *Why not me?*

But just because the reaction is natural doesn't mean it's correct. Or healthy.

Your critique buddy, who just signed a contract for more money than you've made in your whole life, simply got lucky.

It doesn't matter how hard they worked to get this deal. And it *REALLY* doesn't matter how hard they worked compared to you.

They got lucky.

Besides, that's *their* life, not yours. Envying it won't make you a better person. Wishing for it won't compel the forces that control the universe to make things fair. Dwelling on it won't make your books sell more copies.

So how do we handle it when everyone around us is flourishing and we must deal with tragedy after tragedy?

Remember the following:

Life is a race with yourself. The only person you should be comparing yourself to is you. Every time you write, speak in public, or promote yourself, it is within your power to do better than the previous time.

No one deserves success. If you believe there's some grand scorekeeper who is keeping track of how hard you're struggling, you're wrong. Luck determines who wins the lottery. Stick your sense of entitlement in your ear.

Luck favors the prepared. All you can do is try your best. The more you do, the more chances you'll have to succeed.

No one is ever satisfied. This may sound odd, but even those writers who you are convinced live lives of splendor and fortune still want more out of life. The secret isn't about getting more. It's about being happy with less.

So how should you react when your peers are living your dreams?

There's only one reaction that's acceptable.

Be happy for them.

Celebrate the success of others. It should never make you feel bad about yourself. Someone else doing well means that good things actually do happen in this very tough business, and one day they might happen to you.

Especially since you work a lot harder and you're a lot more talented. :)

18 comments

How to Handle Success (Everyone Else's)

Sometimes it seems that everywhere you look, other writers are doing better than you.

Though writers tend to work in solitary, the community is pretty tight-knit and gossipy. Blogs, conferences, Publishers' Lunch, PW Weekly, email, and cell phones, all conspire to spread good news almost instantly.

Even if you're the humblest, happiest, and most down to earth writer on the planet, certain thoughts always creep into your brain. Thoughts like:

- Why did she win the award?
- Why did he get the movie deal?
- Why did she get a three book contract?
- Why did he get invited (and paid) to speak?
- Why did she get the huge marketing campaign?
- Why did he get the million dollar deal?
- Why is she a lead title?
- Why is he with the better publisher?
- Why did she get on TV?
- Why did he hit the NYT bestseller list?
- Why is she on all the panels?
- Why is he getting all the press?
- Why did she get the huge print run?
- Why did he get into Walmart?

And so on. And these questions are inevitable followed by: *and not me?*

After all, you're the better writer. Your book is better. You've struggled longer. You've worked harder. You've written more. Hell, you deserve it more. Why did that writer get it and not you?

I've long preached that comparing yourself to other writers is a one way ticket to despair. It's a no-win situation that can't possibly help you. If you're doing better than your peers, it's easy to develop a sense of entitlement, superiority, and egomania. If you're doing worse than your peers, it's easy to become bitter, angry, and depressed.

Here are some things to keep in mind, which might help curtail the poisonous envy:

There will always be someone doing better than you.

Luck plays a big part, no matter how hard you work or how talented you are.

There is no such thing as karma, no one is keeping score, and no such thing as destiny or fairness.

The writers you wish you were all wish they were someone else.

The only writer you're competing with is yourself.

Anyone can make it.

The last one is the most important. Your goal should be to maximize your opportunities, minimize your weaknesses, and keep at it until you're the one that makes it.

And quit comparing yourself to other writers. It's like comparing yourself to lottery winners, or people who have been run over by cars. No one deserves it.

Now get back to work. Luck isn't going to happen surfing the net, reading blogs.

23 comments

Pimping

Writers should know how to sell their books.

They should also know when to sell their books. And when to sell their peers' books.

As a writer, you will have countless opportunities to meet potential fans and try to interest them in your writing. Booksignings, book festivals, conventions, conferences, library talks, and speeches all offer opportunities to pitch and sell.

But, sometimes, your kind of book isn't the right kind of book for the person you're speaking with. They may only read historicals, or hate books about serial killers, or enjoy cozies with mystery solving cats, or only read female protagonists, etc.

That's a perfect opportunity to pimp your friends.

The situation arises all the time. You're chatting with a potential buyer, discussing the types of mysteries she reads, and your book clearly isn't her cup of tea. But over the course of the conversation, you realize she'd really like X written by your good friend, so it is your duty to put that book in her hands and talk it up.

I do this all the time, and have sold many books written by many of my peers. I've also gone into bookstores and faced out friends' books, and recommended them to the booksellers, insisting they give it a read.

People genuinely respond to recommendations. When you sell your books, there's obviously self interest involved. But when you sell other books, you come across as selfless and helpful.

I go so far as to approach people in bookstores who are buying a book, and telling them about other books they'd like that are similar.

For example, any time I see someone buying Clive Cussler or Tom Clancy, I pimp James Rollins and David Morrell. If people are buying John Sandford or James Patterson, I pimp Tess Gerritsen, PJ Parrish, MJ Rose, and Rebecca Drake. If someone is holding a Lee Child, I tell them about Barry Eisler, JD Rhodes, Harry Shannon, and Mark Terry. If someone has a Robert B. Parker, I mention Harry Hunsicker and Jeff Shelby. If someone has a historical, I steer them to Tasha Alexander. Chick lit readers get Melanie Lynne Hauser. Evanovich gets Karen E. Olsen and Brian Wiprud. Hiaasen gets James O. Born, Bob Morris, and Tim Dorsey. Grisham or Turow get David Ellis. YA gets Alexandra Sokoloff and Wayne Thomas Batson. And so on, with dozens of other writers that I know and like.

While on tour with the Rusty Nail 500, I tag-teamed many stores with many authors. While we pitched to booksellers, we'd invariably run into some customers.

What I did a lot of, during these tag-team drop-ins, is pimp the author I was with. Not that I didn't want to sell my own books, but sometimes I had a feeling the reader would like my companion's books more. Or

sometimes I'd be Mr. Selfless, and try to help my friend sell their books. Or sometimes I'd pop my head in while my friend was doing their pitch, and reinforce it, assuring the customer it is a worthwhile purchase.

On many occasions, my friends did the same thing for me.

This holds true for any occasion when there is more than one author present. Yes, we all have an overwhelming desire to sell ourselves, but sometimes it's damn cool to pick up your buddy's book and tell someone, "You'll love this, trust me."

I can't count the number of times I tag-teamed a bookstore and a customer wound up buying both of our books.

As you forge lasting friendships with peers, you'll soon fall into a natural rhythm and be able to sell their books automatically, without even trying.

This isn't a competition. We're all in the same boat, and helping each other is smart business. It reminds me of an old church sermon about heaven and hell.

Hell is a huge banquet, with every possible delicious food imaginable. But everyone seated at the table is miserable, because the only way to eat is with forks that are ten feet long, and no one can feed themselves.

Heaven is also a huge banquet, with delicious food. And heaven also has forks that are ten feet long. But in heaven, everyone is happy, because they're feeding each other.

Feed each other. Pimp your peers.

24 comments

Writing Organizations: Should I?

I recently had a talk with an author friend who was saddened that a writing organization she has belonged to for many years has changed its acceptance guidelines and now doesn't regard her as an active member because her print runs are too small.

My advice to her was two simple words:

Fuck 'em.

Personally, I've never been a proponent of writing organizations. And at the risk of alienating myself from my peers, I'm going to list some reasons why I think you don't need them.

First, let me say that I've belonged to just about all the major genre organizations at one point or another. And they aren't entirely without benefit.

Awards.

You can be allowed to nominate books for awards, and in some cases vote for them.

Promotion.

Your books are mentioned in their promotional material, in print or online.

Meetings.

You get invited to meetings, which allow you to mingle with peers, and banquets, which allow you to mingle with peers while wearing nice clothing. Often these meeting have interesting speakers, and sometimes (more importantly) liquor.

Publications.

You have chances to appear in organization-sponsored anthologies.

Conferences.

You're allowed to participate in conferences and conventions that the organizations sponsor.

Good Will.

The organization often claims to help raise awareness of the genre you're writing in, and may contribute to worthy causes.

Now, readers of this blog already know my feelings about awards. To reiterate: They ain't important. Not a single one.

Sure, they make the writer feel good. And they can get your publisher excited. They might even result in extra sales and interest in your books.

But I have a hypothesis, which I won't confirm because it will take too much time to do so and I'm a lazy bastard. If you take all the bestselling books of 2007, and compare them to all the award-winning books of 2007, there won't be a lot of overlap.

Someone prove me wrong, and then effectively argue that the awards fueled the bestsellerdom.

Besides, this point may be moot, because in the case of many awards, you don't have to be a member of the organization that offers it in order to be nominated.

As for promo material, I think this has a certain amount of worth. Having your latest release mentioned in a widely circulated newsletter certainly can't hurt. Sure, you'll probably be buried among the dozens, or hundreds, of other releases also mentioned in that newsletter. But every little bit helps.

Whether this little bit justifies the steep (and still escalating) yearly costs of being part of a writing organization remains to be seen.

Being invited to meetings, or parties, is a great way to meet peers. Especially if you're a newbie. But you don't need to be a member of anything to meet peers. You only need to attend book fairs, conventions, and conferences, and you'll meet plenty of peers. Along with fans and booksellers, who are more important to your career than your peers are.

You get invited to submit to anthologies. Okay, this is a biggie. A real biggie. But I've been a member of many organizations, and have only been in one antho because of my membership. I've been in around twenty other anthos, no membership necessary. There are plenty of collections that don't require membership.

Many organizations host conventions. I think this is great. While attending conventions holds limited appeal after you've already done several, it's still the best way to introduce yourself and your work to the public, and a great place to shoot the shit with your peers. But even if you belong to the organization holding the event, you still have to pay to get into the event. And guess what? You can go to the event even if you aren't a member of the organization. So where's the real benefit?

As for raising awareness about the genre, I've had the unique opportunity to meet a few thousand booksellers. Some of them know about awards and writing organizations. Most of them don't. Ditto the fans.

The diehard fans who attend conferences do know about the awards, and a few of them care about them deeply. But I'll conservatively estimate the number of mystery, thriller, and horror fans who attend conventions to be less than 10,000 people total.

If your book only sells 10,000 copies, you won't be in this business very long. And chances are high you're not even going to sell to 1/100 of those folks.

The majority of the book buyers don't know, or care, what organization you belong to, because these organizations aren't raising the awareness of the average book buyer. They're preaching to the choir.

If I've missed any benefits to joining an organization, I'd love to hear them and be proven wrong. But now that we've gone through what I see are the positives let's talk about some negatives.

Volunteering.

Boy, can you get screwed volunteering.

The time you spend judging award submissions, organizing a conference, or sitting on a board, can be substantial —-taking away from time where you could be writing or promoting. It's also exhaustive, stressful, and never appreciated. No good deed goes unpunished, and devoting your free time to helping an organization that you joined because you wanted it to help you is one of Dante's inner circles of hell.

Lack of Representation.

By a show of hands, how many of you have ever joined an organization and gotten EXACTLY NOTHING for your dues? Where did your money go? How did being a member benefit you? What exactly did the organization do for you that you couldn't have done for yourself?

Professionalitis.

This is when, because you consider yourself a professional writer, you must cloak yourself in the trappings of professionalism, one of which is joining an organization that reinforces the fact that you're a professional.

Bullshit. A union is one thing. But as far as I'm concerned, the only single criteria needed to prove you're a writing professional is if you've gotten paid for your writing.

Groups, clubs, cliques, and gatherings of like-minded folks are part of human nature. As is excluding other folks. *Us* and *them* is genetic. We all want to be *us* rather than *them*.

But here's a better idea. Be *you.* Because it's *your* books, *your* career, and if your feelings about either are dictated by the approval of your peers, *you* need to seek some therapy. Which brings us to:

Peer Pressure.

I've had some writing organizations give me the hard sell. A really hard sell, that becomes embarrassing and uncomfortable. Talking candidly with many of my peers, they continue to renew their memberships because they feel pressured into it, are worried about being though less of, and figure a few hundred bucks a year is worth not having to deal with the hassle of actually standing up and saying, "Wait a second, you're not doing shit for me."

Of course, if you do say that, don't be surprised if that organization offers you a volunteer position so you can help to change the very thing you're complaining about.

Conclusion.

If this blog post angered you, it's probably because you're a member of an organization that you feel has helped you. That's awesome. I'd love to hear from you.

Just don't be shocked if I reply and explain how you could have gotten the same benefits on your own.

I've done a lot of self-promotion, to varying degrees of success. In JA's World, joining a writing organization shouldn't be at the top of any writer's Must Do List.

Maybe it can't hurt. Maybe it can even help. But I think that rising dues, increasingly exclusionary practices, and very little return on investment for the average member has taken what was once a good idea: helping like-

minded people succeed in a hard business, and turned it into organizations that exist solely to be self-sustaining rather than beneficial.

Of course, I'm also an opinionated jerk.

The Alternative.

Naturally, I have an idea for a writing organization I'd like to see. Let's call it WWJAD. Here are the rules, and what the organization does for you.

1. You must have written and published a book. If you have, you can join.

2. Your $100 a year dues invites you to attend WWJAD Con. You do not have to pay extra admission to get in. And at the con, you get 15 minutes of time to speak to everyone in attendance. No competition. There's one mike in the convention room, and that's the only program going.

3. WWJAD Con has a printed program book, which contains your bio, and a page about your work that you write. Could be an ad. Could be an excerpt. But it is only a page.

4. WWJAD Con is a three day event held at a cheap hotel. Admission is free to all attendees, but, like a carnival, they can buy tickets for $1 each. This fee goes toward paying for the hotel space, program book, and the poor bastards who are helping to run the con. No volunteers. If you work the front door, you get paid for your time.

5. During WWJAD Con, all authors have table space for their books. They give their book, for free, to anyone who gives them a ticket. How long you spend at the table depends on how many books you have to give away. Can this be expensive? Sure. But the best advertisement for your writing is your writing.

6. The WWJAD Award will be given at the end of the conference. Whoever has the most tickets wins the prize. Just like Chuck E. Cheese. Awards are popularity contests anyway, so why not be honest about it?

What's the Point?

The purpose of belonging to WWJAD is to give you an opportunity to mingle with peers, speak in front of an interested crowd, meet fans, possibly win an award, appear in a program, and give away as many copies of your books as you can afford to.

In other words, most of the pluses and none of the minuses of every other writing organization.

Dues, and $1 ticket sales, go toward running and advertising the event, and maintaining the WWJAD website.

Oh, and if you miss the event, your dues get refunded. And depending on the number of members, this could be held in different areas at different times of the year, to minimize travel costs and maximize fan attendance.

I'd join. Would you?

34 comments

Bending Over and Taking Advice

I give advice all the time, often without being asked.

A wise man (Baz Lurhmann) once said: *Advice is a form of nostalgia, dispensing it is a way of fishing the past from the disposal, wiping it off, painting over the ugly parts and recycling it for more than it's worth.*

He's right. We feel we've earned our experience, and sharing it with others makes us feel good by believing we're helping someone else.

Because advice is more about the advisor than the advisee, most of it is useless.

Of course, this blog is a notable exception, and my words should be taken as gospel.

"But JA," the canny among you might say, "you can give advice, but can you take it?"

Yes.

And no.

While everyone truly believes they have an open mind (they also believe they have a sense of humor and are an above-average driver), very few truly do. We're saddled with years of prejudicial, repetitive behaviors, and very little can make us entertain new ideas, let alone attempt them.

Anyone who has heard the story of how I got published knows my eureka moment was when I realized I didn't know what I was doing and starting looking critically at the situation and listening to others. In other words, I did the best I could to become a blank slate with an open mind.

My mind ain't so open any more.

The problem with being right is you take being right for granted, and assume one successful strategy means they're all successful.

Of course, they're not. Learning is about observing, asking questions, and experimenting with what works. It's not about getting an idea and automatically knowing it is the gospel truth.

So, like most people, I feel I know a lot. But I also try to listen to contrary viewpoints, and if possible, incorporate them.

For writers this is essential.

Since it's impossible to be objective about our own work, and our own careers, it's mandatory to get the advice of others. Family. Peers. Agents. Editors.

When they say things we automatically agree with, that's not very helpful. Sure, validation is nice. But you won't get better or smarter unless someone tells you what you're doing wrong.

It isn't easy being told you're wrong. But it is a wonderful opportunity to learn something.

When I'm given advice I don't agree with, here are some strategies I use to gauge its usefulness:

1. Consider the source. If the source is a trusted friend, or a respected peer, or an industry professional, I listen more closely. The importance of the person offering advice doesn't make the advice correct, but it does give it more weight than that overly-critical dunderhead in your writer's group or your Aunt Helga who keeps asking if you're rich yet.

2. Consider the intent. The best advice comes from people who have a good agenda. A flippant remark from a jealous sibling doesn't mean as much as a detailed critique by your agent, who is trying to sell your work.

3. Drop your guard. You can't hear advice when you're being defensive. Attacking the advisor turns it into an argument, not a discussion, and offering knee-jerk rebuttals is childish.

4. Listen. Listening is something that very few have mastered, but it is THE most powerful social skill. Completely hear the person out, and ask questions to clarify things.

5. Imagine. Think, really think, about the possible outcomes if you take this advice. Worst case scenario is you always learn something by trying it. Best case scenario is the advisor is 100% correct and just saved your ass.

6. Weigh. Advice, by its nature, usually goes contrary to what we're currently doing. In some cases, it gives us direction where there is none. But in many others, it asks us to change our direction. After you imagine where this advice might take you, you must weigh that against the path you're already following. Drop your pre-conceptions, and look at both ideas without ego. What are the pros and cons of each, and which will be better for you?

7. Act. You learn by experience. I think everyone should try just about anything at least once. Bias doesn't help you to grow. Denial doesn't help you to learn. Only through action can you truly understand cause and effect. If you like the advice, then take the advice rather than just dwell on it. I also believe that you should try taking advice that you don't necessarily like, just so you can study the outcome.

8. Thank them. Being grateful, and gracious, makes the advisor feel all warm and toasty, and ensures you'll be getting advice again.

I also need to add that giving advice, while cheap and easy, requires more than just an opinion and a big mouth. Many people don't want advice, so you should only give it when asked, or at least offer to give it before blurting it out. I try to give advice based on experience, rather than on hypothesis. This blog is about the things I've learned. Sure, there are also educated guesses, and my opinions are still subjective and hardly universal. My advice might even be flat-out wrong for you.

But if you want to know whether you should take my advice, you should take my advice about taking advice.

16 comments

Conference Culture

I'm off to Bouchercon this weekend, and figured it would be a good time to talk about conferences.

The fact is, not many books are sold at these things. I can play the schmooze game as well as anyone, and over two thousand fans will be at Bouchercon, many of them who know and like me, but if I sell more than fifty books over the weekend I'll be surprised.

So why go? When this trip is over, my expenses will be well over a grand. Is it really worth my time and money?

In a word, yes.

Even though many writers attend Bouchercon (and the many other annual writing fairs and conventions) to sell books, that isn't the main goal. It's nice when it happens, but these appearances are more about goodwill than sales.

When we writers go anywhere, we become ambassadors for our writing. Projecting an image of success and confidence, while being gracious, funny, and accessible, does more than get a few people to part with their money. It helps establish a brand.

Word of mouth is the ultimate selling tool, and anytime you have a chance to speak in public, you're able to spread your message to others, who in turn (if they like you) will spread it to others. Being talked about favorably, even by those who haven't read your books and have no intention of reading your books, will lead others to read your books.

Ultimately, bookselling is a popularity contest. And befriending as many people as possible is in every writer's best interest. To do this, we must go where the people are.

There are other benefits of attending conventions as well. Networking with peers is a nice way to blow off steam and have fun, but it also results in meeting people who can potentially help your career. Conferences are great for establishing and solidifying work friendships. Then down the road, when someone is looking for stories for their antho, or you're looking for a blurb or an intro to an editor, the time you spent at the bar buying rounds of drinks will more than pay for itself.

The things to keep in mind, to help maximize your time at the convention, can be reduced to a simple list.

1. Stay in public. Hiding in your room between panels is not why you came here. Go where the people are.

2. Be friendly. A smile goes far, and kind words go even farther.

3. Meet people. Try to introduce yourself to as many people as possible. Sit with strangers, chat in elevators, ask fans questions, approach authors you like and buy them beer. The only time you should be alone is in the bathroom.

4. Promote yourself. All writers should have a 20 second pitch, that they can launch into *when asked.* Wait to be asked. Have business cards or something similar to hand out to people.

If you can keep those four things in mind, you'll have a productive conference. You'll also have some fun.

19 comments

Con Etiquette

I'll be hanging out at the **Love is Murder Mystery Convention** over the weekend, and wanted to go over a few ground rules and some quickie dos and don'ts.

Should You Go? I believe writing conferences are one of the only times it's okay for an author to spend money (we all know money flows toward the writer, not away.)

Unfortunately, many of them are out of state, travel and hotels are expensive, and the conference admission can cost anywhere from $100 to $500 dollars.

But there are several big reasons why newbie and pro authors should attend these events.

Networking. Meeting fellow professionals keeps you foremost in their mind when projects arise. Publishing, like all other businesses, is about people.

Camaraderie. While networking is about business, camaraderie is about hanging around with like-minded individuals. Socializing with writers is part of being a writers.

Panels. Being on them if you're a pro, watching them if you're a newbie. If done an extensive post on this before. **http://jakonrath.blogspot.com/2006/09/conference-tips.html**

Pitching. Any decent conference has agents and editors there. An in-person pitch gets you on top of the slush pile if they ask to take a look —your submission becomes solicited rather than unsolicited, and the agent/editor has a face to go along with a name.

Fans. I put this last, because unless you're already a bestseller, you won't be signing a lot of books. But meeting fans in person is powerful juju, and a handshake and a few kind words will likely be remembered for a long time.

If you have decided to attend a convention, here are some tips.

DO hang out at the bar. This is the best place to meet and mingle, and much more relaxed than anyplace else at the con. If you're buying drinks, you can ask anyone a question or bend their ear for a few minutes, even bigshot editors, authors, and agents.

DON'T get sloppy drunk. It will be remembered, and talked about.

DO wear business casual. The better you look, the better you'll feel.

DON'T be nervous. Everyone was a newbie once, and no one cares if you're perfect.

DO buy books. We're all in this together. If you're an author, buying books is also a great way to get in good with the bookseller.

DON'T talk too much. We learn by listening, not talking, and you're probably not as interesting as you think you are. Or as I am. :)

DO introduce yourself to strangers or people you know from their reputation and/or online. Sit at strange tables during communal lunches. Chat up people in elevators. Smile a lot.

DON'T hang out with the same crowd over and over and over. Yes, hang out with them, but don't limit yourself to only them.

DO pass out business cards, and ask for them in return. That means have some made if you don't have any. They should have your email and website on them —name and phone number isn't necessary.

DON'T sell hard. Conferences are about creating good will, not cramming your books down people's throats. A soft sell is okay, if kept to under 20 seconds, and if you're not doing it all the damn time.

DO thank whoever is running the con. It's an awful burden, and they deserve a pat on the back.

DON'T make any concrete plans. Cons are very liquid, and often you don't know what panels you'll watch, who you'll be hanging out with, or where you'll end up. Go with the flow.

Finally, remember to **set goals.**

While you don't need to figure out ahead of time what you'll be doing for every second, you should have reasons for attending the con. This isn't vacation time. It's business. You should know who you want to meet, what you want to accomplish, and have a mental checklist of reasons why you're attending in the first place.

Selling 100 books and asking JA Konrath to blurb you isn't a realistic goal. Shaking 100 hands and buying JA a drink is a much better goal, and within your power.

Like all aspects of writing, convention-going is both fun and hard work. The better prepared you are, the more realistic your expectations, and the fun should outweigh the work.

And if you see me, I like microbrewed beer and quality bourbon. Buy me enough and you might get that blurb after all...

12 comments

Brain Donors

Maybe it's just me, but I've noticed a lot of really stupid behavior lately.

Here are some of the dumbass characters I've recently run into on the World Wide Web.

THE ONE STAR WHORE - Some folks go on certain review sites and feel the need to bash stories with one-star reviews. Why? I can only deduce some over-inflated sense of self-importance that compels a percentage of the population to see their diatribes on the internets, sort of the equivalent of a giant refrigerator door. Look what I did, Mom! I'm a negative prick!

JOE'S RESPONSE - Negative reviews amuse me. I don't complain about them, or try to have them removed, because I believe rational people can come to their own conclusions about whether or not to read something, and aren't influenced by poorly-worded hate-fests. I particularly love the reviews from people who got the book for free and then feel the need to warn folks against ruining their lives by making the same mistake they did and reading the offending material. I bet your family can't stand you.

THE SPOILING CRITIC - Getting professional reviews is important to writers, and it comes with the territory that a certain amount of them will be negative. But some asshole critics think their job isn't to rehash and rate, but also to spoil major plot points in the book.

JOE'S RESPONSE - Those who can't do, teach. Those who can't teach, critique. Those who can't critique well, spoil. How frustrated a person do you have to be to want to ruin someone else's potential enjoyment? Perhaps we should ask the folks at Kirkus that very question.

THE CONTEST MOANER - I was recently a contest judge, and some folks took exception to my list of "don'ts" I recently blogged about. They feel I'm not fair.

JOE'S RESPONSE - Don't enter contests. If your story is good enough, find an editor who will pay for it. But guess what? If you do the things I mentioned not to do, you won't find an editor. Also, someone is knocking on your door. It's Life, and he's holding a big sign that says "I'm Not Fair." Maybe you should let him in and get to know him.

THE WOE IS ME AUTHOR - We all know the publishing industry drops books and series all the time. They have a myriad of reasons for doing this, many of them impenetrable. But whining about this in public, no matter how much it stings, is asking for sympathy, which is pathetic.

JOE'S RESPONSE - You do not get future book contracts through sympathy. Yes, the publishing industry is often unfair, and sometimes downright idiotic. But airing your dirty laundry isn't the way to fight back. Fight back with great writing. We all get kicked. But we don't have to acknowledge it. After sincerity, the thing all people must learn to fake is confidence.

THE ENTITLEMENT JUNKIE - These folks seem to think they deserve some sort of success, and like to spout the Conspiracy Against Them and publicly wonder why they aren't getting what they're due.

JOE'S RESPONSE - No one deserves anything. There is only luck and hard work. Once you feel you're due something, or that people are keeping you from getting yours, you're on a slippery slope that usually ends in obscurity.

THE GREEN FAIRY - Envy is a disease. It's easy to look at other writers and compare yourself to something they possess; money, fame, awards, print runs, bestsellerdom, talent. It's also easy to take pot shots at these writers, while secretly (or not so secretly) wishing you were them.

JOE'S RESPONSE - Your race is with yourself, not with your peers. Never compare yourself to another writer for any reason whatsoever. Once you start wishing for someone else's career, you aren't tending to your own.

THE ME ME ME - The definition of a bore is someone who talks and doesn't bother to notice if anyone else is in the room. Writers may be more self-absorbed than most, but they shouldn't mistake this for being so fascinating that every other word they speak is "I."

JOE'S RESPONSE - If you're in a conversation and more than half of it is coming from your mouth, it isn't a conversation —it's a monologue. If you're in a conversation and the only questions you ask are directed at yourself, I pity the poor saps stuck in your orbit. At least have the decency to pass out cyanide capsules when you walk into the room.

THE INSULTER - Nothing says "I'm pathetic" like name-calling. Yet some folks feel the need to hurl insults, and direct criticism toward the person rather than the comment. This, like many of the above, is a result of the Internet, which buffers accountability. As such, some folks feel it is okay to be rude little twits, because they're protected from being socked in the mouth.

JOE'S RESPONSE - If you wouldn't say it to a person's face, don't say it on the net. Ideas and opinions are a lot of fun to discuss, defend, and attack. But once it becomes personal, you've lost control, and lost the discussion, you asshole.

THE SELF-PUBBED MARTYR - There's nothing wrong with self-pubbing. But the majority of the writers in the world won't equate it with traditional publishing, for too many reasons to be discussed here. If you want the respect of your peers, it isn't going to be by logically presenting your points and calmly discussing why their views are irrational, any more than intelligent discourse saved anyone on the Trail of Tears. And bemoaning your lack of respect in the publishing world is just a rally for more people to attack you.

JOE'S RESPONSE - If you want the respect of your peers, get a traditional publishing contract. Personally, I think peer respect is useless, and trying to join a club that doesn't want you is futile. Stop trying to convince the world you're relevant. The world will ultimately figure that out for itself.

THE KNOW IT ALL BLOGGER - This guy spouts advice and opinions like he's God's Gift to the World, guising his superiority under the banner of "being helpful."

JOE'S RESPONSE - Thank this man profusely, and buy all of his books. The latest is CHERRY BOMB, now on sale...

36 comments

Internet

Driving Traffic – Using the Internet To Promote Your Writing

Let's talk about traffic. Not rush hour bumper-to-bumper traffic, but the Internet kind.

Writing is part art, part craft. But publishing is a business. That means you have to earn money to survive. If you're an author, the secret to earning money is becoming a brand name—an automatic purchase.

The World Wide Web can help you do this. According to www.internetworldstats.com there are over 1 billion people online, and almost 70% of the US population is surfing the net.

Five years ago, only a handful of authors had homepages. Two years ago, very few people knew what a blog or a podcast was. And who could have predicted the amazing success of YouTube, MySpace, and Wikipedia?

No matter what type of writer you are—fiction, non-fiction, even unpublished—this article will help you use the Internet to maximize your brand.

YOUR HOMEPAGE

All authors need a homepage. Yet very few know what to put on it. Many believe it's simply a 24 hour advertisement for your books, requiring no more than a cover jpeg and a few jacket blurbs. Those people are wrong.

Here's the secret to a successful author website; it should be sticky. As the name implies, there should be enough content on your homepage to make people stick around for a while. Content comes in two forms: information and entertainment.

My website, www.JAKonrath.com, features over a hundred pages of content. Besides the standard book excerpts and reviews, I have free short stories, full e-book downloads, dozens of pages of writing tips for newbie authors, contests, a message board, a sign-up newsletter, videos, and funny pictures, along with an updated appearance schedule.

Your website, and everything you do on the net, isn't about what you have to sell. *It's about what you have to offer*.

And don't be concerned about posting your stories. It's doubtful anyone will steal them (and if they do, you can sue because whenever you write something you automatically own the copyright.)

If you're posting stories, or books, you're trying to sell, I recommend taking them offline when you start the submission process. But if they were ever online at some point, no one will mind. Chances are, no one will even know.

YOUR BLOG

A blog (short for *web log*) is a way to directly communicate with people several times a week.

Successful blogs focus on a specific topic, and become forums for like-minded individuals to comment and exchange ideas. Thriller writer Barry Eisler's blog (www.barryeisler.com/blog.html) focuses on

politics and language, while chick lit (or more precisely, *mommy lit*) author Melanie Lynne Hauser posts extremely funny anecdotes about motherhood (www.melanielynnehauser.com/wordpress.)

My own blog, A Newbie's Guide to Publishing (www.jakonrath.blogspot.com) features over 300 essays about writing, marketing, and promoting. Often other people—even bestselling authors—disagree with my opinions. This is great. There's no such thing as bad publicity, and controversy draws readers.

Should you be blogging? Yes. But first you need to figure out what your blog is going to be about, and if you can write on that topic three times a week for the rest of your life. I have some tips on how to do this in the sidebar.

If you want to get started blogging, you can for free at www.blogger.com and www.wordpress.com. These sites also provide automatic RSS feeds, which allow readers to subscribe to your blog, rather than check it every day for new content.

You can also blog for free on MySpace.

YOUR MYSPACE

I've heard statistics that www.MySpace.com has four times as many daily visitors than Google. It's easy to see why.

MySpace is all about you. Your favorite books, music, and movies. Your pictures. Your likes and dislikes. Your friends.

If you're a published author, chances are someone has already mentioned you on their MySpace profile. When you put up a MySpace page (which is free) people will come to you, wanting to be your online MySpace Friend. Once someone is your friend, you can send them messages, post comments on their MySpace pages, or even send bulletins to all of your friends at once about your new book release, or magazine sale, or author signing.

But it gets better. You can search for like-minded people as well. I write thrillers similar to Harlan Coben, but they're funny like Christopher Moore. You can bet I looked at Coben's and Moore's MySpace pages and invited their Friends to be my Friends.

YOUR BOOK SITE

Sure, you've got an author homepage, but do you have a site dedicated to a single book?

Taking a cue from the movie industry, authors and publishers have begun creating websites for individual book titles. David Morrell created a whole interactive web experience for his bestseller *Creepers*, featuring the setting from the book at www.theparagonhotel.com and you can visit the www.nextgencode.com, the fiction company Michael Crichton writes about in his novel *Next*. My own more modest effort can be found at www.thesegunsforhire.com, to coincide with the release of an anthology I've edited.

YOUR AMAZON

Amazon.com, the world largest online bookseller, encourages authors to add content to their site in a variety of ways.

www.amazon.com/connect allows published authors to set up their own bio page and blog, which is linked to every book of yours they sell. It lets you to stay in touch with readers who have bought your book through Amazon, and alert them when your new titles are released.

www.amazon.com/shorts allows people to download a short story of yours for 49 cents. It's great for fans who are anxiously awaiting your next book, and it is also a cheap way for a potential buyer to give your writing a try without plunking down the big bucks.

Plus, you make money; every download earns you 20 cents —-which is pretty good considering a paperback sale only nets an author 55 cents.

You don't have to be a novelist to partake in this program, as long as you're published somewhere and Amazon sells that book. Humorous mystery writer Tom Schreck (www.tomschreck.com) has three Shorts on Amazon, and his only prior publishing cred was a story in one of the Chicken Soup books. The success of his Amazon Shorts helped him find a publisher for his novel.
www.amazon.com/listmania allows you to create a list of books that are similar to yours, which comes up as a sidebar when people do searches on those authors. Your recommendations can lead fans of other authors to your books.
www.amazon.com reviews are more than just a way to give your favorite authors a pick me up —-your thoughtful comments about their books can also lead their readers to you.

YOUR AUDIO AND VIDEO

If you're one of the last people on the planet who doesn't have an mp3 player yet, you're ignoring this technology at your own peril.

People love to download audio content, either to their computer, or to their portable players like iPod and Zune.

An mp3 blog is an audio file on your homepage, blog, and/or MySpace, which can be listened to online or downloaded as a file and played on various equipment.

A podcast is an audio file attached to an RSS feed, which allows it to be syndicated.

You can get the audio recording software for free (I use www.audacity.com) and then visit iTunes to make your recording into a podcast, also free.

Your audio blog or podcast can be as simple as you reading your work, or doing an interview, or you can create entire radio shows with music and commercials.

If video is your thing, then visit YouTube.com and upload that clip of you on Good Morning Sheboygan, your book trailer that you created using Flash, or that fan video of you speaking at your last bookstore event. Once you're on YouTube, you can embed the clip in your website, blog, MySpace, and all over the net.

THE REAL SECRET TO INTERNET PROMOTION

The simple fact is: anyone looking for you on the net can find you. While it's good to make your current fanbase happy, most writers are looking for new fans. But how are people going to find you if they don't even know you exist?

You have to lead them to you.

Every time you send an email with your URL in your signature line, post on your blog, leave comments in a forum, exchange links with another author, join a Yahoo Group, make a MySpace friend, upload a YouTube video, or add connected to your blog or website, you're building roads.

These roads can last for years, and they always lead back to you. The search engines find them. Surfers find them. People looking for other things find you instead.

Using www.statcounter.com, you can see where your site visitors come from, how long they stay, and what search engine terms they used to find your site. I still get hits on blog entries I wrote three years ago, by people looking for "free ebooks" "co-op money" "how to get published" and of course "Jack Daniels."

The bigger web presence you have, the more links you have coming in, the more chances people have to discover you. And they *will* discover you.

You can spend a fortune hunting mice. You can mount expeditions, buy expensive mouse hunting equipment, tour the world, and devote all of your time to tracking those little suckers down.

Or you can toss some cheese in the corner and wait.

The choice yours.

GETTING PEOPLE TO FIND YOU

1. Search engines.
I don't recommend EVER paying to be listed on a search engine, because all of the important ones will list you for free if you have correct meta tags a regularly updated site with a decent amount of information. There are plenty of services who offer to list your URL on 40,000 search engines for only $9.99. That seems like a bargain, but when was the last time you used www.maxpromo.com or www.wisenut.com to look anything up? Save your money.

2. Links.
Remember that old shampoo commercial, where the woman told two friends, and they told two friends, and so on, and so on? Links do the same thing for your website. The more people who link to you, the better off you are. The secret to attracting links is to have content that people desire. Trading links also works. Just email a fellow writer and ask to trade. Search engines love links, and the more you have going in and coming out, the higher your placement will be.

3. Newsgroups, Listservs, Yahoo Groups, Message Boards.
Or any public forum where you meet like-minded individuals band together and exchange ideas. The key

to successfully establishing a presence on these forums is to contribute intelligent points in a polite and logical manner, rather than yelling *BUY MY BOOK!!!* every time you post. Your comments should always have a signature line that leads to your blog or website, but people will click on that because they want to know more about the clever person who said those smart things, not because you beg them to.

4. Paper.
I'm a firm believer that the more pieces of paper your name is on, the better you'll succeed in publishing. Because of this, I write a lot of short stories and articles, do a lot of mass mailings, and pass out a ridiculous number of coasters and business cards. Each of these lists my website URL. You should put your URL on everything. Mine is on the bumper of my car, on every ad and flyer, and even on my checks. Every piece of mail I send out gets a www.jakonrath.com rubber stamp on the back. I always mention my URL in newspaper and radio interviews, on panels, and while doing signings. Overkill? I get 1000 unique hits a day, and I'm a midlist genre writer.

5. Wikipedia.
Chances are if you Google something, www.wikipedia.org will be one of the top responses. It's an online dictionary where the entries are written by the readers. If you're a published author, have a friend do a Wiki on you (you can't do one on yourself.)

COMING UP WITH CONTENT

For sites to be visited frequently, you have to keep up a steady supply of new content. That's the reason most blogs fail, and why most author websites only get updated once a year. Coming up with new information and entertainment on a regular basis makes most writers dizzy.

But don't worry; you can work around this dilemma. If you look closely at successful sites, you'll see there are some secrets to providing regular new content.

1. Aggregate the content.
The web has become so overwhelmingly huge, you can't possibly look at everything you find interesting. Neither can anyone else. This is a good thing, because once you find something interesting, you can share it.

Providing links to interesting sites, excerpts from interesting sites, or even media from interesting sites, has become easier than ever. You can share things with your fans that you didn't have to create yourself, because it already exists on the net.

This saves you time, and can bring readers back day after day, to see what you've compiled.

2. Help from friends.
No one said your site had to be a solo effort. The multi-author blog means less individual posts for you, but higher overall traffic because each author has her own fan base. Killer Year (www.killeryear.wordpress.com) First Offenders (www.firstoffenders.typepad.com) and The Good Girls Who Kill For Money Club (www.good-girls-kill.com) are all great examples of this. You can also interview people, which creates content. Or have guest bloggers. When a stranger is on your blog, she'll point people in your direction. Some of those people will like what they see and come back on their own.

3. Let the surfers do the work.
I set it up a new blog in a way where I don't need to devote much time to it. It's called The Anonymous Publishing Vent Club (www.ventclub.blogspot.com) where industry pros can complain about this business without naming names. The visitors are the ones who write the posts, not me. All I do is make sure the queue keeps going, which is only a minute or two of work every day.

If you host a message board or a forum, you can keep people coming back to your site with minimal effort on your part. Plus, when people have input in something, they develop a sense of ownership and community, which accounts for longer surfing times and multiple daily visits.

4. Being innovative.
Don't be afraid to try something new or different. Innovation is what spearheads Internet success, not copying what was done last week. Experiment. Get crazy. Analyze what works on you, then try to make that work for other people on your site. If it flops, you can always delete it with no residual effects. In this age of uber technology, you're only limited by your imagination. Think big.

The 24 Hour Advertisement

I've heard it said that an author's web site functions as a never ending commercial.

I agree, to a point. A homepage should have information about your writing and your books. But if that's all it does —-advertise your products —-then you won't get many hits, or generate much buzz. TiVo allows us to eliminate commercials... why would anyone intentionally go looking for them?

Which is why I suggest you have more on your site than four blurbs and a link to Amazon (which indy bookstores hate to begin with.)

But this blog entry isn't about how to make your site sticky (I go into detail on how to do that here.) Instead, I want to talk about how people can find your site on the world wide web. You've raised your shingle, now how do you get the traffic?

1. **Search engines.** NEVER pay to submit to search engines —the big ones allow you to submit your URL for free, and no one uses the little ones i.e. "submit your site to 700,000 engines for $29.95." When was the last time you used searchbunny.com to surf the web? Stick to Google, Yahoo, AOL, Hotbot, MSN, Altavista, Lycos, Overture, Dogpile, and Excite... but only if they don't charge. Don't pay per click... you think Stephen King does that?

My website is listed on all major engines, and I never paid a cent. They found me.

Make sure you have decent Meta tags on all of your pages, for the spiders to crawl (if you don't know what I'm talking about, pick up a book on web design.)

2. **Publications.** Your website address should be printed on all of your books, and included with bios for short stories, articles, and interviews. Every time your name appears in print, your URL should as well.

3. **Business cards.** Have two types made up; one with all of your personal info (phone, email, address) and one with just your website. I also put my URL on flyers, bookmarks, and even on my personal checks.

Give business cards to everyone you meet. I put them in bills I mail out, and drop them in check presenters when I go out to eat. Your motto: Everyone gets a card.

4. **Email.** Your email has a signature tag —put your URL in there. If you have more than one email account, make sure they each list your URL.

5. **Newsgroups and List Servs.** Google News and Yahoo have thousands of online groups discussing books. Join and post, making sure you always add your URL. The bigger online mouth you have, the more opportunities to pass around your link.

6. **Blogs.** I've been posting messages on other people's blogs, and I'm surprised how many people click through to my website.

As with newsgroups and list servs, contribute to the conversation. A non sequitur that does nothing but direct people to your website is spam. But say something smart or funny, and people will check out your website automatically.

7. **Links.** Trade links with as many folks as you can. Email websites and ask if they'd like to reciprocate, and swap business cards with author friends you meet at conventions. The more links coming in the better... all roads lead to Rome.

8. **Google Adwords.** I have some friends that swear by this. I haven't tried it yet, but you can find out about it here.

9. **Print ads.** Every time you, or your publisher, places an ad, it should have your URL on there.

10. **Newsletters.** If you have a print or email newsletter (and you should... collect names at signings and conventions and through your site), you should always have your homepage listed.

11. **Amazon.** For all the hoopla about Amazon, they don't seem to sell that many books. For example, I sold about 15,000 copies of Whiskey Sour in hardcover. About 2000 were through Amazon.

Still, you can focus some effort there. Amazon has many paid programs for writers and publishers to ensure better placement for your book. I've never done that, but I indulge in some of their free services; book reviews and lists.

I review books with the name "J.A. Konrath, author of Bloody Mary." People who click on my name are directed to my URL.

Amazon also lets you compile Favorites Lists. I've made a few lists of mega-bestsellers which also include my books. Hopefully people who like James Patterson or John Sandford will read the lists looking for similar authors, and then discover me.

12. **Other.** My publisher and Bookreporter.com are holding a contest for the release of Bloody Mary. You can enter the contest here. While I'm thrilled they're promoting my book, a quick read of the page shows that they forgot to ad my URL.

I hadn't known they were running this contest, or I would have commented on adding my web address. I could ask them to add it now, but I'd come off sounding like an ungrateful ass... "Sure, it's a nice contest, and I appreciate you being behind my books and all, but where's my website information?"

So that's a missed opportunity. An opportunity that hasn't been missed comes from buzzketeer M.J. Rose, who is linking 500 blogs to her vidlit page http://www.vidlit.com/mj/ to raise money for Reading is Fundemental.

Vidlits are visual commercials for books, kind of like movie trailers.

I think M.J. is a pioneer in new marketing ideas, but that doesn't mean her ideas work (lots of pioneers died in the woods.)

I love her, and she's certainly becoming known in the writing community, but so far her efforts haven't made her a bestseller.

Nor have mine, for that matter.

What do you folks think? Does her Vidlit make you want to buy her book? Did it make you click through to her website?

I know I'll be watching her Amazon numbers to see if they shoot up. She's currently at 42,000 rank on Amazon, and her promotion begins today.

12 comments

Blogging Isn't Temporary

Blogging, like newspaper and radio, is often mistaken for a disposable form of information. Yet I get lots of hits from Google on old blog posts, and many of them continue to accrue comments.

Pay attention to what you're posting today, you bloggers of blogland. Because it will still be around tomorrow. If your posts are topical, or without purpose, you're not doing yourself a service.

Let me repeat that: Blogging Isn't Temporary. What you do now may one day be surfed by someone who isn't even born yet, and that path will lead back to you. Do you want that path to result in interest or apathy?

Think about why you blog, and what purpose it's serving. Look at your last fifty entries. Will they be of any interest to someone in 2017? If not, why do you think they are of any interest to anyone now?

That's why I don't do memes. That's why I don't blog about personal stuff. That's why I don't push my own books constantly —-no one ever seeks out ads. And that's why, except on rare occassions, I don't blog about events, peers, friends, family, or what I watched on TV last night.

Your blog is a tool. But too many people are using hammers to scratch their asses rather than drive nails. If you blog as a form of entertainment, that's no problem —have fun. If you blog to increase your name recognition, you may be doing more harm than good.

Now I'll take questions.

Q: But JA, if this blog isn't about promoting your own work, why are you doing it?

A: Go to www.foodnetwork.com. What do you find? Recipes. Lots of recipes. Do they help raise the Food Network's Nielsen ratings?

Q: What exactly are you saying?

A: If you provide a service, or information, or entertainment, it leads to brand association and name recognition in a positive way —-much more positive than you could ever get from a commercial or an ad.

Q: I still don't get it.

A: People have so many choices concerning what to buy and what to do with their time that they've become very selective. They don't want to be sold anything. They prefer to cater to their needs by seeking out information without being battered with it. Then, once they find something that works, they stick with it.

Q: How does this apply to author blogs?

A: It's about what you have to offer, not what you have to sell. Content brings people back, makes them talk about you, and continues to be relevant years later, leading more people to you. And unlike advertising, you don't pay for it, and it lasts longer than a few newspaper issues.

Content leads to name recognition, and more opportunities to promote yourself. A certain number of these people who discover you will become your fans, and help spread the word. You don't link to an ad. You don't

tell your friends about this cool billboard you saw. But you pass along content, and how to find content, all the time.

Q: I've often wondered why only a few people link to my blog, or post comments...

A: Are you telling the world something they want to hear? Or are you telling the world something you want to say?

Q: Has this blog helped you sell a lot of books?

A: I've sold a few books thanks to this blog —books that I wouldn't have sold otherwise. I've also gotten a lot of press, speaking opportunities, and publicity from this blog —opportunities I wouldn't have had otherwise.

You can travel the world and spend a lot of time, money, and energy hunting for mice. Or you can bait some traps, sit back, and the mice will come to you.

Q: You keep ragging on advertising. Doesn't advertising help spread name recognition?

I don't believe that name recognition alone sells books. I can name hundreds of authors, and thousands of products. That doesn't mean I buy them.

But name recognition PLUS a positive experience does sell books. And that's what I'm trying to do with my blog, my website, my MySpace, my newsletter, my articles, my free e-books, my short stories, and my career; provide a positive experience.

Advertising isn't a positive experience. Sales isn't a positive experience. Climbing to the top of a pole with a megaphone and shouting "ME ME ME!" isn't a positive experience.

Offering content in the form of information and entertainment is a positive experience. Personal interaction is a positive experience. Word-of-mouth is a positive experience. Providing a service is a positive experience.

Take a close look at your blog. What kind of experience are you providing?

21 comments

On Blogging

While I often slip self-promotion into my blog, I think of it mostly as a teaching/venting opportunity, as well as a chance to interact with readers and writers.

On that front, I want it to be read, to be discussed, to be successful.

Over the past few days, several statistics hit me at once.

Someone sent me this link, which I found amusing:

http://blogshares.com/blogs.php?blog=http%3A%2F%2Fjakonrath.blogspot.com%2F&search_type=url

The same day, someone else sent me this link:

http://www.business-opportunities.biz/projects/how-much-is-your-blog-worth/

I've done my own informal polls on how many people might be reading this blog on a daily basis, but these two links were so intriguing that I finally put some www.statcounter.com code on the blog.

And I was surprised. I'm getting about 1000 unique visitors a day.

Many are coming in from links on other blogs. I've checked out www.technorati.com to see how many people link to me. I'm grateful for the traffic.

If you'd like to trade links, email me.

That said, I'm baffled by the amount of power some bloggers seem to have over readers. I offer advice based on my experience, and I'm flattered many folks seem to follow that advice. But remember that what worked (or didn't work) for me might not get you the same results.

Here's a quick list writers should keep in mind when surfing blogs:

1. Remember that no one is always right, no matter who they are or claim to be.
2. Try different approaches, and discover for yourself what works and what doesn't.
3. Be wary of bloggers on power trips, or those who try to inspire fear.
4. If you're ever confused by something, post questions.
5. If you ever disagree with something, post a rebuttal. Debate is good.
6. Name calling is not good. Try to focus on the topic, not the blogger.
7. The blogosphere is not real life. Don't treat it as such.
8. Anonymous posts should never carry the same weight as those who use their name.

If you're a writer, and don't have a blog, I suggest starting one. Sure, it takes up a lot of time, but there are few self-promotional efforts that can have such a targeted and direct impact.

Here are some tips for those considering starting a blog:

1. Trade links with as many other bloggers as you can.
2. Pick a topic for your blog, and stick to it.
3. Add content at least once a week, and make sure your entries have a specific focus.
4. Don't blog several times a day, every day —this won't give readers a chance to comment.
5. Don't abuse your blogging power.
6. Invite a little controversy —it makes things more exciting.
7. Respond to all questions.
8. Learn about RSS feeds.
9. Blogs don't have to be perfect, but the same rules apply to blogs as to manuscript formatting. Proofread, spell check, avoid long paragraphs, pay attention to how your words look on the screen, edit.

See you in the blogosphere!

6 comments

Is Blogging Incestuous?

These days, everyone seems to have a blog. I'm all for it. Even if the blogger is an illiterate bonehead who has nothing to say, he should be allowed to say it.

Publishing blogs seem to be on the upswing. Several NY editors and agents are blogging, their identities hidden by pseudonyms. More and more professional writers are using blogs as ways to communicate regularly with fans. Newbie authors are documenting their struggles to succeed. There's a lot of good information out there, being exchanged.

So why does it seem like the entire book blog world exists only to feed itself?

I have a blog, and I post on other writer's blogs, and then they post on my blog. I link to them, they link to me (and by the way, if I haven't linked to you yet, email me and I will.) Sometimes I'll visit ten blogs and see that the same three people have posted on every single one of them.

Now part of that may be because writers tend to know each other, and when you're on the computer ten hours a day of course you're going to waste some time. Part of that may be that writers tend to be a bit more self-important than the general population, quick to give their opinions whenever the opportunity arises. Or, it may just be one giant auto-erotic stroke job, and the entire framework of the book blog community rests on the shoulders of half a dozen men and women with nothing better to do.

If I haven't already slit my own throat here, I'd like to point out that I'm pleased with the response and traffic my blog gets. I like the regulars who hang out here (even the ones who generate debate.)

But I'd also like to know if more people are reading this than just the folks I link to.

If you read this blog and have never posted before, I'm asking you to take five seconds and post something. I've even temporarily allowed anonymous posts, so you don't have to sign up.

I want to hear from lurkers, from surfers, from the busy, the shy, the lazy, the wallflowers.

Prove to me that you're out there.

117 comments

Responsible Blogging

Let's talk about public forums on the Internet.

I'm a staunch believer in freedom of speech, and the information superhighway is quickly becoming the preferred way to communicate. Unlike telephones, the exchange can be permanent, and unlike newspapers or books, it allows for instantaneous self-expression, followed by instantaneous reaction and response.

Never before in the history of the world have people been able to express themselves so easily and quickly.

Perhaps too quickly.

An unforeseen phenomenon sprung shortly after the first chat rooms and message boards appeared. A specific type of person who used the Internet not as an open means of intelligent discourse, but to call people names, cause trouble, and refuse to listen to reason or apologize for their behavior.

We call these people trolls.

Trolls enjoy causing trouble. They like the attention they receive from being insulting, demeaning, and provocative. The name troll comes from the fishing lexicon —to troll means to cast out your lure and wait to see what bites.

Unlike real life, where calling someone a nasty name, or pointing a finger and shouting untrue accusations might get you into big trouble (and perhaps even force you to defend your words) the Internet is the perfect venue for cowards such as trolls.

In short, there is no accountability. A troll can make wild claims, attack people and organizations, and do it from the safety of their own home, never having to personally confront the people they condemn, or take responsibility for the harm they've caused.

Let's use a hypothetical example. Let's say someone used a blog to level some serious accusations against, oh, let's call it a group of writers. In this person's perception, this writing group has done something really bad, something really unforgivable, such as nominate writers for some awards.

Wait, that's not really unforgivable, is it? Well, what if we make all the nominees... MEN.

I know, I know —-what a despicable assortment of scoundrels this writing group must be. But try to bear with me for a moment.

At first glance, you might look at this nomination list and think, "Well, this writing group must be excluding women."

While this conclusion might not be particularly well thought out, it is a legitimate perception.

Now, if you're a staunch support of women's rights (as we all should be), you'll be angry that no women are represented on this ballot. So angry, in fact, that you decide to use the Internet to vent your anger.

So you do what any smart person would do. You go to the organization's web site, looking for information about how this could have happened. You contact the co-presidents and board members, demanding an explanation. You speak to the judges to seek the reasons why there are no women on...

Oh, wait. I take that back. What you do is write a blog entry calling the organization bigots, sexist, and stupid, without any hard facts to back up this belief.

But we can chalk that up to passion, right? After all, sexism exists in the world, and it is an important issue, and if it has teeth and eats sheep it has to be a wolf, right?

But what if the organization comes forward, and politely points out that they are not, indeed, a wolf? They are a teddy bear. And they didn't kill your sheep. They're actually very sensitive to the needs your wooly friends. And they have proof, facts, and evidence to back this up.

That's when you be a woman and admit to your mistake, right?

Or do you cling to your original, erroneous perception, show no remorse for the people you've insulted and the harm you've caused, and continue to stick to your prejudices?

What would you do?

The funny thing is, the Internet is partially responsible for this situation. If I were to pick a random person, say, bestselling author David Morrell, and call him a bigot to his face, chances are he'd get mighty angry and demand to know why I said such a thing. I might have to use things like facts and logic to back up my rudeness. I might even have to defend my position and my original argument.

But not on the Internet. Because on the Internet, any coward can say whatever they want to say, without accountability. They can hurl insults without having to look into the face of the person, or people, they are insulting.

When these people can't even respond or defend themselves, such as judges who have signed non-disclosure agreements, it must feel particularly self-righteous and liberating, because you don't have to face them, and you don't even have to read their objections.

That's how you know the true troll from people who have simply made honest mistakes. The trolls never admit they are wrong.

I wonder how libel laws apply to blogs? I wonder if an organization can prove damages if some motormouth makes untrue accusations? I wonder if big writing organizations with big coffers ever hire big lawyers?

Hypothetically, of course.

32 comments

Blogging 201

You might notice a few new items in the sidebar of this blog. Or you might not, because you aren't very observant. If that's the case, take a quick look.

First, I've made all of my previous blog posts accessible by title, so you don't have to go hunting through dates to find the info you're looking for.

Next, I've made it easier for people to subscribe to RSS feeds.

What's an RSS feed?

I'm glad you asked, because I only had an inkling of what they were until a few days ago. Fellow scribe **Alphabeter** patiently explained the whole RSS/XML/Atom business to me, and I found her so witty and informative that I asked if I could share her info with my readers.

So if you're looking to boost your blog traffic up to the next level, print out a copy of this guest blog entry, and then stop by **Alphabeter's Blog** to thank her in person —er, in cyberspace.

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The *"I don't want to look like an idiot"* guide to Internet Syndication

by Alphabeter

If you are reading this, I am guessing you know how to read. But do you know how to use a Reader?

Let me throw a lot of terms at you. RSS. Atom. XML. Blogroll. Simple.

That last one hopefully caught your eye. I am going to try and explain how to get and read your favorite blogs, syndicated articles, and comics simply.

Feed Me Seymour

Firstly, the blog entry, article or comic sent out is called a feed. There are different kinds of feeds-Atom and RSS. RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication. RSS is based on XML, a standard for exchanging textual information between applications on the Internet. The current RSS is 2.0.

Because of opinions regarding the over-restrictions in 1.0 and the loose gaps in 2.0, several programmers branched off and created Atom. My personal preference is for Atom as it is easier to customize once you know what you want to do. Many blogs and websites only offer one kind of feed —for example, Blogspot only offers a full entry Atom.

What does that mean? With both Atom and RSS, there are **several levels of feeds**. They include: full entry, full entry with comments, excerpt, comments only, and index. Full entry is the entire blog post,

article or item. Comments are the messages people add after the item is posted. Excerpt is an abbreviated entry. It can be the title and first few lines or an shortened entry specifically written for feed distribution. However, nearly every Reader can receive all the various feeds.

Read Me all night long

Now the **Reader itself**. If you want to collect and read feeds, there are many choices available depending on your computer's operating system. I use both Macintoshes and PCs, so I am going to try and be fair in covering all platforms. Whether you use Linux, Mac OS X, Windows 98, 2000, ME or XP (home or pro), there is a Reader for you. The main options are: a separate program, a browser build-in, or through a website. The laptop I am writing this on is a Gateway with a pentium 3 processor running Windows 98SE. I use Firefox 1.6 and a website Reader.

Separate programs

There are many desktop applications for Linux, Windows and Mac OS system users. Some are free and some charge for privilege.

Two quality free ones are RSSOwl (Mac OS X and Linux-Open Source) and Twins Web News (Windows; works like email client). Both require a few MG of installation space and must be running to update new feeds, but in my experience neither seems to have compatibility problems with the AVG, Semantic/Norton and/or Zone Alarm security programs.

Two that charge for what they claim is quicker access to popular feeds, special premium feeds and features are FeedDemon (Windows) and NetNewsWire (Mac OS X). Both have a small purchase price but dozens of feeds pre-loaded so you can explore the syndication "universe" right away.

Not all of these programs work on every variation of Windows and Linux. And the Mac ones often only work on OS X and up. Note the download requirements BEFORE installation!

Browser build-ins

These are extensions that can be added to the program you use to view websites to enable Reading within your browser like a webpage.

Firefox 1.0 and up (Windows and Linux) has several variations.

Internet Explorer 6 does not have this option. However, IE 7 Beta build has this ability.

Opera (Linux, Windows, Mac OS X) has varying abilities depending upon the platform.

Using a website to read feeds.

On my blog, I have a list of writing-related blogs I read daily or whenever they have new entries. It also includes a rolling blogroll javascript. Anyone can just go to my blog and click from there.

Another option is a website that is the Reader. This is called an aggregator. I personally use Bloglines. I give my email address, create a password and I can access it from any computer in the world with internet access. I can add any feed publicly available. On average I receive over 300 feeds a day. (Its addictive!)

Using Firefox, I can open entries in new tabs and bookmark items I want to save. IE will open in new windows, but can also save favorites for as long as they are on the web. For LiveJournal and other blogs with locked entries however, I need to go to their sites, enter my password, and read the entries there. Fortunately with del.icio.us (an online bookmark site) and Firefox, I can open these all in one window through tabbing.

Other aggregators include: NewsGator and My Yahoo.

Syndicating Your blog

How can you publish your own RSS Feed?

If you have a website or weblog, you can add RSS syndication as a publishing option. Some companies do this automatically. This depends entirely on how your site is served today. If you are using a hosted publishing tool like TypePad or Blogger, you probably already publish a feed. [http://yourblogname.blogger.com/atom.xml] is the standard feed URL for blogs hosted on Blogspot/Blogger. It can be turned on or off in the dashboard control panel by the blog owner.

Investigate whether your provider's administration tools offer feed-related options or controls. Other types of websites and application platforms may require some programming skills in order to add RSS syndication capabilities. WordPress offers a free, multi-platform interface.

Once you have a feed established, you need to get it 'out there'. I joined several aggregators which added my feed to their directories. I also place their buttons on my blog so people finding it can easily add it to their Reader of choice. Google (You must have a google account), Pluck's Feed Finder and Syndic8 are just a few of them.

I hope this provides a simple overview of the basics. If you have any questions, comments or just want to send me your unpublished manuscript for a fee (KIDDING!!), feel free to drop by my blog anytime. I reserve the right to publish all dirty emails.

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Thanks to Alphabeter for the info. Questions welcome.

And since we're on the topic of blogs and links, if you want to trade links, email me. If you already link to me and I haven't returned the favor, or if I promised to link to you and then forgot, let me know.

12 comments

What Makes a Good Blog

You've got a blog but Sarona, Wisconsin —population 7 —gets more traffic. Why aren't people visiting? Why aren't they commenting?

Here are some blog dos and don'ts to help you boost your blogrisma.

1. **Content is King.** It's what brings people back. It's what draws new readers through search engines. If you share important information, experience, and wisdom, you'll build a readership. **Confessions of an Idiosyncratic Mind** is great one-stop-shopping for everything happening in the mystery world, and it is wildly popular as a result.

2. **Lists, Tests, and Bullet Points**. A text-heavy blog is a turn of. Pay attention to negative space. People like to absorb information in bite-size pieces. The easier it is to digest and read, the more return visits you'll have.

3. **Stay Focused.** Stick to one topic per entry, and make sure this topic is different from previous topics so your readership doesn't get bored. What is the reason for your blog? Do you have a reason? **Tess Gerritsen** blogs about the ups and downs of being a bestselling thriller author. She doesn't water down her content with opinions about last night's episode of the Sopranos, lists of her favorite foods, meme tags, or life stories unrelated to publishing.

4. **Ask Questions.** A blog isn't a monologue. The best ones ask questions to provoke feedback. **First Offenders** is very good at this. Solicit opinions, ask for input and advice, and people will offer it.

5. **Be Friendly.** This is the community watering hole, and you are the bartender. Be welcoming, friendly, and accommodating. Answer questions, be polite, and be genuinely glad people have shown up.

6. **Be Controversial.** Arguing is good. Disagreement is good. As long as everyone remains civil, encourage debate. **Lee Goldberg** walks the line between entertaining, informative, and controversial, and his traffic shows it.

7. **Link to Other Blogs.** Go to **www.sitemeter.com** and sign up for free. It will let you see where your traffic is coming from. This is often an eye-opening experience. The more sites that link to you, the more hits you'll get. If you want to see who is alreayd linking to you, visit **www.technorati.com**.

8. **Free Stuff.** Periodically hold contests or give away free things. Everyone loves free things.

9. **Keep Yourself Out of It.** Unless the focus of your blog is your personal life, your personal life doesn't have much of a place in a blog. My focus is about the publishing business. As such, I don't blog about my children. In contrast, **Melanie Lynne Hauser** writes books about a single mother who becomes a super hero after a horrible Swiffer accident. Melanie is constantly blogging about her family because

her books are all about family.

10. **Strive for Perfection.** An occasional typo is harmless. Every other word spelled wrong is annoying. Most blogs have Spellcheck. Use it.

11. **Limit Self-Promotion.** Sure, I hope everyone who reads my blog runs out and buys a copy of **Whiskey Sour** (or clicks on the ***Four Pack of Jack*** link to the right —four stories for only 49 cents!) But if you do this all the time you've become a commercial, not a blog. **MJ Rose's** blog is about self promotion, so she occasionally uses her own books as examples. But she also uses many other examples. Which brings me to the last point.

12. **No Blog is an Island.** Besides linking to other blogs, you should reference other blogs in your blog entries. We're all in the same writing community boat, and giving shout-outs to your peers is classy and helpful. I encourage everyone reading this to check out the blogs I've mentioned in this article. And if you find them to be helpful, informative, or entertaining, consider buying their books.

27 comments

Another Link in the Chain

Let's talk about Internet links.

The astute among you might have noticed that once again my "Blogs I Read" list has gotten longer. And though I haven't updated it in a while, the link list on my **website** has a few hundred links on it.

Am I doing this because I'm a generally nice guy who likes to help other writers out?

Naturally. I love you. You know that.

But there are some ulterior motives at play as well.

Anyone who has installed **www.statcounter.com** or similar trackers on their site can view where web traffic comes from. About 50% of my website and blog hits come from links. The rest come from searches or direct hits.

Considering I get a few thousand hits a week, half of my visitors coming from other sites is a substantial number.

So it pays to trade links with others.

But more people link to me than vice-versa. Why? I often get traffic from sites I've never heard of. Why are people linking to me and not asking for a link in return?

On the information superhighway, content is key. If you have a large amount of information on your website or blog, people link to it for both personal reasons (so they can find the site later) and for selfish reasons (because they want more people to visit their website, and links are a form of information.)

Besides being exceedingly generous (and modest) one of the reasons I link to so many people is because my site then becomes a hub for Internet surfing. I can come here and then visit a few dozen blogs from this central location. I'm guessing that other people do the same thing.

But links do more than direct traffic. They also play a large part in search engine ranking. The more links you have going in and coming out, the larger Google, Yahoo, MSN, and the rest of the engines think your site is. That means higher rankings for searches. Key words and meta tags are important in ranking, but so is site size and links.

If you're curious as to how many people link to your blog, visit **www.technorati.com** and punch in your blog url.

You can also check your website and blog popularity and search engine saturation at **http://www.marketleap.com/publinkpop/**

What's helpful about both of these is that besides checking your own sites, you can check the sites of your peers. While I strongly believe that writers don't have to compete with one another (my fans can be your fans, there's no exclusivity) and I also believe that comparing yourself to other writers is a bad idea,

checking the rankings of those in your peer group can tell you if you need to spend more time on internet promotion, or if your time would be better spent elsewhere.

If your numbers are low, remember that more links and more content are the keys to traffic. Being entertaining and/or controversial also helps. So does being generous, likeable, and helpful.

That said, here are some questions I'd love to get your answers to:

1. Did you discover this blog through a link?
2. Do you regularly visit this blog through a link, a web search, or a direct URL?
3. Do you ever visit any of the blogs I've linked to on this page?
4. Do you link to me and I don't link to you, or would you like to trade links? If so, let me know and I'll add you to this blog.

57 comments

The Long and the Short of Amazon Shorts

If you've visited Amazon.com lately you may have noticed an interesting new market for writers called the Amazon Shorts Program (www.amazon.com/shorts). Known primarily for selling printed books online, Amazon has taken the leap into digital publishing. They're offering downloads—both fiction and non-fiction—to readers for the paltry sum of 49 cents. As of this writing, there are over twenty-two hundred shorts available, in twenty-five genres ranging from romance to business investments to graphic novels. Buyers can read the stories online, have them sent to their email addresses, or print up copies.

This is a paying market, with twenty cents from each download going to the author. Anyone who has a book available for sale on Amazon is invited to submit work for consideration. Many have, including bestselling authors Jeffery Deaver, David McCullough, Deepak Chopra, Terry Brooks, and Danielle Steel.

So is Amazon Shorts a terrific venue for making money and leading new readers to your printed work? Or is it smarter to sell your short stuff elsewhere?

David Morrell, NYT Bestselling author of SCAVENGER, has had his horror story THEY available for download since August of 2006.

"I have a plus/minus feeling about the program," David said. "On the plus side, it's a new way to be published, with a potential for a new readership. For most writers, there aren't many markets for short stories. A new one is welcome, and Amazon has links that help readers find the stories. Eventually, readers might go to other work by a writer they sampled in the Shorts program. On the minus side, while the royalty rate is wonderful, the actual money received tends to be minimal. In addition, many anthologies won't accept stories if they've been published anywhere else, including on Amazon, so the secondary market for an Amazon short can be limited."

According to Amazon's submission guidelines, they seek only unpublished material, and demand exclusive rights for six months. After that period, the writer is free to pursue other publications. As David mentioned, these opportunities tend to be slim, but good stories still have sales potential beyond Amazon. THEY recently sold to a prestigious horror anthology.

International bestseller and marketing guru MJ Rose, author of THE REINCARNATIONIST, has been a part of the program for two years with her Short SCARED OF THE SEX THERAPIST.

MJ said, "I think every single thing an author can do to get their name out there helps, but in this case the Shorts are only available to my existing readers and I don't write the kind of fiction that lends itself to shorts. Do it because there's no reason not to, but don't expect much from it."

What *can* an author expect? My own shorts, FOUR PACK OF JACK and SIX PACK OF CRIME, have been available since late 2005. They've enjoyed continued success in the program, often appearing in the Top 100 bestsellers and occasionally breaching the Top 10. So far I've earned about a hundred dollars for each Short, with quarterly royalty checks in the $15 to $30 range.

Much more successful is NYT bestseller F. Paul Wilson, author of BLOODLINE. His Short features his character Repairman Jack, popular hero of thirteen supernatural thrillers. It's been in the Top 10 since June of 2005. When I asked Paul how much more he was earning than me, he replied:

"THE LONG WAY HOME is 7700 words in length. Based on figures gleaned from Amazon's annual 1099s, I believe I'm within calling distance of a dime a word. More difficult to evaluate are increases in backlist sales —-the raison d'etre for the program, I believe. I'm confident I've seen an uptick. So, for a guy like me with a big backlist, it's been worth it."

Does that mean you shouldn't bother with Amazon Shorts unless you already have a huge fanbase? Tom Schreck, whose debut mystery ON THE ROPES was recently released by Midnight Ink, thinks otherwise.

"I was able to qualify for Amazon Shorts by virtue of the fact that I had a story published in one of the Chicken Soup anthologies. I wrote Shorts in part to make my novel more attractive to publishers. I believe this showed Midnight Ink I was serious about writing and that I understood and valued marketing, which contributed to them signing me."

Like Paul and Tom, my Shorts feature the protagonist from my thriller series, Lt. Jacqueline Daniels. I've heard from many people who sampled Jack for 49 cents, then went on to buy my novels. Plus, my Shorts will remain on Amazon for as long as I choose. The royalties have been small, but they haven't diminished. Given time, perhaps I can reach thousands in sales.

Will your Amazon Short lead to an anthology inclusion, big money, or a book deal? The odds are against it, but the odds are against writers anyway. If you qualify, it's certainly worth a try. In fact, it may even be the way of the future.

AMAZON SHORTS PROS:

Promotes your backlist.

Enlarges your Amazon.com presence.

Decent royalty rate, with unlimited earning potential.

New market, leading to new fans.

AMAZON SHORTS CONS:

Doesn't pay well, unless you're already a bestseller.

Only accepts shorts from authors with work appearing on Amazon.com.

Wants exclusive rights for six months.

Will probably limit secondary market sales.

Amazonymous

Hey there, Author, checking your Amazon sales rank 15 times a day —-why don't you try to be proactive rather than reactive and use some of Amazon's features to your advantage? Why be Amazonymous when you can actively influence your own sales?

www.amazon.com/connect allows authors to set up their own bio page. It's free. And after the first of the year, it will also allow you to contact readers who have bought your book through Amazon.

Mine is **here.**

www.amazon.com/shorts allows people to download a short story of yours for .49 cents. I'll have a new Jack Daniels story up there in a few weeks. It's great for fans who are anxiously awaiting your next book, and it is also a cheap way for a potential buyer to give your writing a try without plunking down the big bucks. Plus, you make money —every download earns you 20 cents —-which is pretty good considering a paperback sale only nets an author 55 cents.

www.amazon.com/listmania allows you to create a list of books that are similar to yours, and which comes up when people do searches on those authors. This is a list of recommended reads that appears in the sidebar when popular authors are searched. One of mine is **here.**

www.amazon.com reviews are more than just a way to give your author peers a pick me up —-you thoughtful comments about their books can lead their readers to you. So release your inner Harriet Klausner and go review some books. This is especially important if you believe in karma.
Don't know what Amazon rankings mean? Neither does anyone else. For a quick and dirty explanation, check out www.fonerbooks.com/surfing.htm. But my own experience and experiments don't necessarily agree.

I do know that Amazon is supplied by the distributor Ingram, and a call to 615-213-6803 can let you know how many books Ingram has shipped for this year and last.

Want to make money from Amazon? You can join Amazon Affiliates at www.amazon.com/associates and get a few cents every time someone orders your book through your site. If you want to link to Amazon, I also suggest you link to other bookstores as well, to give your surfers a choice of where to buy. I personally do not link to Amazon, becuase I've found that indie bookstores dislike it.

So what are you waiting for? Get into the Amazone.

10 comments

Trekking the Amazon

How do Amazon rankings work? What do they mean? How does ranking correlate to actual sales?

A pretty good explanation can be found at http://www.fonerbooks.com/surfing.htm.

That's all fine and dandy, but is it correct? How many books does it take to make your ranking soar? How many in one day? How many per hour?

I decided to try and find out.

On Thursday, August 25, at 9:22am, my Amazon ranking for Bloody Mary was 76,534.

This is a record of the next 24 hours:

August 25, 9:22am - Rank 76,534 - Ordered 2 copies of Bloody Mary.

9:49am - Rank 79,435

11:00am - Rank 79,435

2:24pm - Rank 24,411 - Ordered 2 more copies of Bloody Mary.

3:21pm - Rank 28,418

4:49pm - Rank 18,953 - Ordered 2 more copies of Bloody Mary.

6:38pm - Rank 22,103

7:18pm - Rank 25,418

8:00pm - Rank 17,993

9:40pm - Rank 20,142 - Ordered 2 more copies of Bloody Mary.

12:03am - Rank 27,590

12:30am - Rank 19,020

9:20am - Rank 26,011

Conclusions - Got me. I have no idea what this means. Sell two books every 3 hours and hover around 20,000? Sell eight books in a day and hover around 20,000?

I called Ingram (615-213-6803), which supplies Amazon, and so far this year they've distributed 816 Bloody Mary's. I don't know what percentage of these are through Amazon.

But then I'll look at the numbers of another thriller author who released a handcover at the same time as mine —-about 8 weeks ago. Her Amazon rank averages between 3000 and 8000, and she's also been in the hundreds. A call to Ingram shows she's sold 1090 copies this year.

That means I've sold about 102 copies a week, while she's sold 136 copies a week, or 19 a day to my 14 a day.

All of those ARE NOT through Amazon.

Maybe we can say she's selling 10 a day through Amazon, which is keeping her in the 6000 range. I'm selling 7 a day, which is keeping me at 25,000.

Or maybe not.

I checked my friend's recent paperback rank: 25,646. My recent paperback rank is 212,332. But a call to Ingram tells me she has sold 786 this year, and I've sold 979. Huh?

So all in all, this stupid experiment has taught me nothing. Other than: don't worry about Amazon rankings.

Live and learn.

Anyone want to buy eight signed copies of Bloody Mary?

9 comments

MySpace Redux

Let's talk about MySpace.

I joined a while back, did a quickie profile (www.myspace.com/jakonrath), made some Friend Requests, and then basically treated it like email; something to periodically check.

Then, gradually, I spent more time there. I beefed up my page. I began searching for mystery readers to invite as Friends. And I came to realize that it had serious potential as a marketing tool.

My main marketing belief is: The more pieces of paper your name is on, the better.

Your name is on your books, naturally. But it can also be on ads, on short stories and articles, on blurbs, on business cards and coasters and bookmarks, on mailers, on reviews, etc.

Virtual paper (the Internet) works in a similar way. Like Rome, all roads can lead to your website through links and searches. A "hit" is the same as being on a piece of paper.

In the short time my MySpace page has been up, I've gotten over 4000 profile views, and have made about 700 Friends. A few of them probably read my books as a result of seeing the page.

But is it worth the time invested?

Blogs and websites draw visitors with content. Either a surfer is looking for you specifically, or looking for a topic that your site covers, and then they find you.

MySpace is different. The search criteria are more specific. So specific, in fact, that an author can seek out a demographic pretty easily. They can still find you. But you can also find them.

I put a lot of info on my website and blog and hope someone reads it, and likes it so much they buy my books. But with MySpace, I can look for the people who I think would like my books.

In other words, a website has roads leading in to it, but MySpace has roads leading out.

So how does a MySpacer find roads to travel?

The Dumb Way

MySpace is ridiculously easy to surf. You read one profile, and it links to 500 others. So you read one of those, then another, then another, and so on. While surfing, you can request to be Friends with anyone who looks interesting. This takes a long time, and you're not really narrowing down a specific demographic.

It's possible to use the Browse feature, but that only lets you list criteria such as location, appearance, and religion. If you're looking for 40 year old native American women who smoke and live within 50 miles of you and are bi-curious, this feature is for you. If you're looking for fans of Janet Evanovich, browsing won't help much.

A Smarter Way

Fortunately, MySpace also has a search feature. You can search for fans of Evanovich, and then ask these folks to be your Friends (this is only helpful if, like me, you share fans with Evanovich.)

This makes a lot of sense. The MySpacers who list Evanovich (or Grisham, or Patterson, or Child) care enough about those type of books to mention them in their profile. Without too much effort, you can find the names of thousands of readers who love authors similar to you. Many of these could become your MySpace Friends, and a fraction of them will read your books. This seems like a much better way to use MySpace.

The Even Smarter Way

Of course, why should you compile a cadre of readers when others have already done this for you? You can find authors similar to you on MySpace, and then directly contact all of their Friends from their MySpace pages.

A dozen authors can lead you to thousands of fans.

Unfortunately, it's still a pain in the ass to contact each individual MySpacer and send them Friend Requests.

Right?

The Smartest Way

As luck would have it, there's an even easier way to do this. MySpace began as a way for bands to recruit listeners and inform them of upcoming gigs. Bands quickly learned that the key to selling CDs and tickets on MySpace was to find people who like their kind of music and then invite them as Friends.

But most bands do drugs and drink too much, and they aren't up for spending countless hours adding potential fans one at a time. So some savvy programmers invented ways to invite a bunch of Friends at once.

Google "Myspace friend adder" and you'll get dozens of programs used to add Friends in bulk. They can do this randomly, or specifically.

In other words, I can go to www.myspace.com/jeffstrand and send each of his Friends a Friend Request by simply pushing a few buttons. I can also send them each a Message at the same time, perhaps saying "I was surfing MySpace and I saw you're friends with Jeff Strand. I always like to meet Jeff Strand fans."

Mr. Strand has been building his friends list for months, and I vacuumed it up in two days (MySpace administration won't let you make more than 400 friend requests per day.) Thanks, Jeff!

Pretty cool, huh?

But it gets better. When you have a big list of Friends, MySpace lets you send Bulletins to them. Your Friend Adder (I use Badder Adder) also lets you send bulk Messages and bulk Comments to your entire Friend List (or anyone else's Friend List.) You can pimp out the look of your page and add music, pictures, and video. You can add a blog. And even if you ignore your page for weeks at a time, people will still find

and and request to be your Friend, which leads to more links, and more links, and more links.
Is MySpace a guaranteed path to success? Hardly. But it's one more weapon in your marketing arsenal, and it has the potential to reach a lot of people —even more than your website, your blog, and your newsletter combined.

Give it a shot. Spend a few days playing around. And be sure to build up your Friend List... I'll be by to steal it next month.

65 comments

Have a Dirty Martini

Though the official release date for my new Jack Daniels novel, Dirty Martini, is July 3, you should be able to find it right now at bookstores everywhere.

Library Journal said: "Mix witty repartee with edge-of-your-seat suspense, over-the-top killing devices, and action that never takes a breather, and you have Konrath's latest white-knuckle thriller. Not to be missed."

Booklist said: "Like Jeffrey Deaver, Konrath ratchets up the suspense until readers don't dare stop flipping the pages. A solid success for those who like to mix comedy with grit."

Publishers Weekly said: "Dirty Martini is a particularly potent mix of equal parts mirth and mayhem with a dash of sex and a twist (or two) of plot. It should be taken straight, no chaser needed."

Kirkus said: "The prose ranges from careless to wretched, and the plot demands a breathalyzer."

Ah, Kirkus. If I hadn't burst out into laughter when I read that, I might have been irritated.

I sent out a MySpace bulletin a few days ago, and got over 200 positive responses, plus my Amazon numbers for each book in the series jumped in conjunction with the bulletin. For those authors interested in using MySpace as a promo tool (which should be all of you) here's my post:

— — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —-

Hello (your name here)!

I'm your close, personal MySpace Friend, thriller author JA Konrath.

I hope everything is going well where you live in the world. How about those local sports in your area? I never would have predicted that win or loss.

I check your MySpace page several times a day. I know you're busy with all of those cool things on your Profile, like that awesome music you listen to, the cool TV shows and movies you watch, and those wonderful hobbies you have. I love those pics you may have posted. You're a truly awesome man or woman!

If you have some free time this week or next, I have a tiny favor to ask. My new Lt. Jack Daniels mystery novel, DIRTY MARTINI, is now available in bookstores everywhere.

Please buy a copy. :)

It's a fast, fun, beach read kind of book, about a homicide cop hunting for a lunatic who is poisoning Chicago's food supply. There's a lot of humor (you'll laugh) and some scary parts. Plus, plenty of action, suspense, and a little bit of sex as well.

If you like books by James Patterson, Janet Evanovich, Tess Gerritsen, Christopher Moore, Patricia Cornwell, Dean Koontz, Dave Barry, Kay Hooper, Kathy Reichs, Sandra Brown, John Sandford, Carl Hiaasen, Ridley Pearson, Robert Crais, David Morrell, or Robert B. Parker, you'll really love this book.

If you like TV shows like CSI, Law and Order, The Closer, Bones, The Flintstones, Curb Your Enthusiasm, American Idol, Survivor, The Sopranos, Sex in the City, Deal or No Deal, or Oprah, you'll really love this book.

If you have a pulse and can read without moving your lips, you'll really love this book.

DIRTY MARTINI is a hardcover. For every book sold, I'll donate a portion of the funds to ending world hunger, by taking my family to a nice restaurant.

If you can't afford a hardcover, please pick up my new Jack Daniels paperback, RUSTY NAIL, available at bookstores everywhere. This one is even scarier that DIRTY MARTINI. If you liked Silence of the Lambs, or Blades of Glory, you'll love it.

Please buy a copy. :)

My books are also available on audio, so you can listen to them while travelling, or working out, or watching juggling videos on YouTube.

If you're so broke you can't even pay attention, you can get my books at the library. If your library doesn't carry them, demand that they do. Try yelling loudly and throwing things. That's how my son gets his way all the time. And he's 23.

Thanks so much for your time (Your Name Here)! I'm so happy we met on MySpace. You've enriched my life and made me a better person.

Please buy my books, or I'll start cutting myself.

Your Friend,

JA

— — — — — — — — — — — — — —

I'm off to Italy for a week. My Italian publisher, Alacran Edizioni, is flying me out to do some signings for **Whiskey Sour.** I'm excited, and encourage the many Italian readers of this blog to seek me out while I'm there.

When I get back, I'm going to release my next newsletter, which will have info on past and upcoming contests, along with a touring schedule for Dirty Martini. I'm looking to visit the West Coast this time.

Until then, check out the latest Jack Daniels novel, and let me know if the prose really does range from careless to wretched. Better buy several copies and get your friends' opinions too.

23 comments

Internet Real Estate

The reason people visit any site on the world wide web is for content. They're looking for entertainment, information, or both.

Creating sticky Internet real estate is hard. You must have an idea of what people want, and have the talent to give it to them. But it doesn't end there.

For sites to be visited frequently, you have to keep up a steady supply of new content. That's the reason most blogs fail. That's the reason most author websites get updated once a year. Coming up with new, interesting, and different information and entertainment on a regular basis makes most authors dizzy.

But don't worry; you can work around this dilemma. If you look closely at successful Internet sites, you'll see there are some secrets to providing regular new content.

1. Aggregate the content. The web has become so overwhelmingly huge, you can't possibly look at everything you find interesting. Neither can anyone else. This is a good thing, because once you find something interesting, you can share it.

Providing links to interesting sites, excerpts from interesting sites, or even media form interesting sites, has become easier than ever. You can share things with your fans that you didn't have to create yourself, because it already exists on the net.

This saves you time, and can bring fans back day after day, to see what you've compiled.

2. Help from friends. No one said your site had to be a solo effort. The multi-author blog means less individual posts for you, but higher overall traffic because each author has her own fan base.

You can also interview people, which creates content. Or have guest bloggers. When a stranger is on your blog, he'll point people in your direction. Some of those people will like what they see and come back on their own.

3. Let the surfers do the work. When I came up with a workable concept for **Vent Club** I knew it was something I wanted to pursue. (And thanks to author **Melanie Lynne Hauser** for her input and brainstorming on that idea.) The problem was, I don't have the time to devote to another blog.

So I set it up in a way where I don't need to devote much time to it. The visitors are the bloggers. They're the ones who write the posts, not me. All I do is make sure the queue keeps going, which is only a minute or two of work every day.

If you host a message board or a forum, you can keep people coming back to your site with minimal effort on your part. Plus, when people have input in something, they develop a sense of ownership and community, which accounts for longer surfing times and multiple daily visits.

4. Analyzing feedback. I'm guessing you use **www.statcounter.com** or a similar program to see where your visitors are coming from, what they look at, and how long they stay. This information should be used

for more than just ego stroking. If you have pages on your site that aren't sticky (few visits, short views) then you need to replace them with something better. That's like buying land and not developing it.

You should also listen to personal feedback in the form of email, messages, and comments. People will tell you what they like, and they're even more anxious to tell you what they don't like. Listen to their comments. It's a poor performer who ignores his audience. Make sure your audience is heard.

5. Size matters. Every page on your website has the potential to last forever. Google and the other search engines crawl these pages, looking for content. The bigger you are, the more roads that lead to you. I still get hits on pages I wrote years ago, because people are finding them. The more hits, the better.

That's why it's also a good idea to exchange links with similar sites. First, because it leads people to you, and second because the more links you have going in/coming out, the higher you're ranked on the search engines. The first few dozen links will be the result of you emailing site owners, asking to trade. But when you get big enough, you'll have people asking to link to you.

6. Being innovative. Don't be afraid to try something new or different. Innovation is what spearheads Internet success, not copying what was done last week. Experiment. Get crazy. Analyze what works on you, then try to make that work for other people on your site. If it flops, you can always delete it with no residual effects. In this age of uber technology, you're only limited by your imagination. Think big.

10 comments

The Short Of It

I've got an article online here:

http://writersdigest.com/articles/konrath_amazonshorts.asp

The article is all about Amazon Shorts, and whether they are a viable market for writers. But that's not the topic of today's blog.

Today we're going to talk about the immortality, in the virtual sense.

Every blog post lasts forever, or at least until there's a server crash or you manually remove it.

I've used the analogy before that a blog post is like a lobster trap. An unmoored lobster pot will kill for decades, because lobsters keep crawling in, getting trapped, dying, and becoming bait to lure more lobsters to their doom. Google and the other search engines, other blogs, websites, message boards, and newsgroups, all link to your blog, treating each entry as a seperate page. A post can keep killing for years after it was written.

Unless, of course, there's no reason for anyone to visit it.

Last week, I mentioned that information and entertainment are what people are looking for. When there are billions of things to see and do on the World Wide Web, having a specific focus can help surfers find you.

Now I want you to think about the last blog entry you either read or wrote. Go on. Think about it. And try to think of the search terms that surfers would need to enter into Google in order to find that post. Then try to think of a one sentence summary that another blogger would use when linking to that post.

If you're writing blog entries that can't be summerized, or can't be Googled using obvious terms, then maybe your blogging time isn't as effective as it could be.

How are people finding your blog? Are they people who are looking for you, or looking for something else and finding you instead?

You can guess which will recruit more readers.

So what is the secret to a blog post that will be relevant a year from now?

1. Define the topic. The more specific, the better. If you blog about baseball, you're competing for search engine rankings with eight million other baseball blogs. If you blog about left-handed pinch hitters named Raul, you'll be ranked higher, and get more hits.

2. Stay focused. Think essay. The Amazon Shorts article above was basically an entry from this blog. I try to make each of my blogs a self-contained article.

3. Offer something. People who read blogs are looking for expertise, advise, and opinion.

4. Encourage user-generated content. Ask questions, allow feedback, and foster repsonses. Debate is what separates the good blogs from the great ones.
5. Be consistent. Post regularly, and stick to the point.

Did I miss anything?

11 comments

Heels

Contrary to what everyone says about me, I'm not perfect.

Okay, actually no one says that about me. But feel free to start the rumor.

Striving for perfection, or at least trying to be the best you can be, is an admirable goal. Unfortunately, it isn't easy. Not due to lack of effort, but lack of subjectivity.

As a wise man once said, "A man's got to know his limitations." That wise man was Dirty Harry. And he's right.

Recognizing our own flaws, and then acknowledging that they need to be fixed, is hard to do.

One of my Achilles' heels is email. I just can't keep up. I answer the quick ones, but the ones that require more in-depth replies or scheduling issues get put off until I have an InBox of ninety-four urgent messages that all need to be answered yesterday.

Perhaps it's a discipline thing. Or perhaps it's a time issue thing. The fact that I don't like answering most email is also a factor. Whatever the case, I suck at email response.

My de facto coping mechanism for this flaw is to wait until the email piles up so badly I have no choice, then I'll waste two days answering it all. This adds unnecessary stress, hurts my career, and is just plain bad business.

But I'm halfway to fixing it. Because I've identified the problem, and the poor way I handle it, I can now try to brainstorm a solution. Here are some options:

1. Hire an assistant. While this would be helpful, I don't have the funds for it. And much as I would like having someone constantly remind me what I need to get done (another big Achilles' heel of mine is forgetfulness) I'm simply not at the stage in my career where it is necessary. I can still handle everything myself, I just don't.

2. Become less accessible. I see the allure in this. A lot of my email is fan-related, or new writers seeking advice. I open myself up to this because it's a way to help spread name-recognition, word-of-mouth, and brand awareness. I'm not a bestseller being bombarded with hundreds of emails a day, and seclusion could hurt more than help. So for the time being I'll keep public email address, and still allow people to contact me directly.

3. Schedule time. This makes the most sense, because it is within my power and budget. If I've established that answering email is important, then I have to devise a plan to get it done.But deadlines and travelling make consistency impossible, and uninforeceable.

4. Garbage in, garbage out. This is probably the best idea, and something I can certainly keep up with. As soon as I get an email, I should answer it immediately. Then I'll never get behind. But there's also a good chance I'll never check my Inbox again.

5. Schedule GIGO, adjusting accordingly. Now we're cooking. If I vow to answer email when it comes in, and chose to answer email at a semi-regular time (such as whenever I boot up the computer, when I wake up, or right after I finish writing my quota for the day) that addresses all of my concerns.

So I'll go with #5. But even though I have a semi-solution, there's still a chance of lapsing. Assuming I have very little self-control (a good assumption) what can I do to make sure I stick to this protocol?

Please hit me with your answer, and then take the opportunity to reveal one of your Achilles' heels, along with potential solutions.

A wise man (not Dirty Harry) once said, "There are no problems, only opportunities." Ask yourself what needs to improve about your career, then challenge yourself to do something about it.

43 comments

On Beyond Google

So you're constantly checking your Amazon rankings, and you Google yourself daily to see if anyone in cyberspace has mentioned you.

Welcome to professional writing.

But there's actually MORE you can do to drive yourself nuts.

Here are some new ways to obsess over your public appearance (or lack thereof). Simply search for your name, in quotes (i.e. "JA Konrath") and let the results roll in.

www.technorati.com will show you how much you are blogged about. So does www.blogsearchengine.com.

www.news.google.com will let you know how 'in print' you are.

www.bn.com proves that people do critique beyond Amazon. If you write mysteries, also visit www.booksnbytes.com.

www.dogpile.com will give you Internet saturation beyond Google. Also try www.mamma.com.

www.marketleap.com will show you how well your website is doing (and how well your peers are doing) with three different search criteria.

www.groups.google.com will let you know who is talking about you in newsgroups.

www.froogle.google.com will show you who is selling your stuff, and for how much.

Still not enough about you? Visit www.ebay.com will give you an accurate appraisal of how much your books (and signature) are really worth. Also try www.half.com, www.abe.com, and www.alibris.com.

I'm still waiting for www.jakonrath.google.com, so I can search my memories for where the hell I lost my keys back in '97.

If anyone has any other cyberspace mirrors (ways to see yourself) that you use, please post them. God knows I don't spend enough time each day dwelling on my career...

Added: Melanie Lynne Hauser has just informed me that you can check if your book is stocked in libraries by visiting http://www.oclc.org/worldcatdownloads/#top and downloading a toolbar.
I played with this for a while, and it works great.

Added: Melanie's husband just forwarded more time wasters to me, this one let's you track your Amazon rank: http://www.titlez.com/welcome.aspx also showing high, low, and average.

This one searches more blogs for you: http://talkdigger.com

83 comments

Now Somebody Scream

The Newbie's Guide To Publishing Book has been grabbed over 2000 times in the last two weeks. But you couldn't tell by looking at that blog entry, which (at the time of this writing) only has 18 comments.

While feedback is an indicator that people are tuning in, it isn't a precise one. Yet, as writers, we crave feedback on not only our stories, but on our blogs and MySpace and websites.

I'll assume, because you're reading my blog, that you're a writer, and that you'd welcome more feedback. Maybe you want to get comments on your blog. Maybe you want fan mail. Maybe you simply want to know that people are out there, even if they don't even respond.

First issue first, how can you tell people are tuning in?

For download tracking, I use http://www.bfnsoftware.com/, which is free. It requires a bit of HTML knowledge to set up, but once it's up and running you can leave it alone and let it do its thing.

For website and blog hits, I use http://www.statcounter.com/, also free. StatCounter is a great service that not only lets you track hits, both repeat and unique, but also tells you how long the visitor stayed, where they came from, what keywords they used to find you, what browser they viewed you on, and what country they're from, among other things.

For my emailing list, I use http://www.ymlp.com/, which is $160 a year. This allows people to sign up for or remove themselves from my newsletter list, and I can send out 9000 emails just by pressing a button. I've played with other bulk email senders, and found this one to be the best.

If people aren't hitting your site, aren't signing up for your newsletter, I've written extensively on how to drive traffic. Remember to offer free entertainment and information, make sure you have a lot of links going in and coming out, that your metatags are specific, and that you have your URL on your email signature, business cards, and on everything you publish.

But what if you want actual human interaction rather than just a hit counter? What if you want email and comments and feedback? Counters let you know people are tuning in, but actual responses are so much more encouraging.

I'm still not 100% sure why certain things get big responses and others don't. Some of my blog entries have over a hundred comments. Some, under a dozen. I started a second blog over a year ago called The Anonymous Publishing Vent Club, which allowed people in this business to let out steam and point fingers without naming names. I expected it to get a lot of traffic. It did, for a while, but it didn't get any contributors. With no one posting, traffic died.

But I have learned a few things about how to get responses. If you want someone in cyberspace to reach out and touch you, try the following:

Contests. I held writing contests for a few years, until it became too hard to keep up. But it did generate traffic, spawn links, get me mentioned by others, and get me a lot of email. If you're holding a contest, make sure it is for something people actually want. A cash prize works best.

Giveaways. This works even better than contests. Instead of having people jump through hoops to get a freebie, just give it to them. Between the contests and the freebies, I spend over a thousand dollars a year just in postage.

Newsletters. I don't abuse my newsletter list, only sending out one or two a year. Some writers send them out monthly. Some even weekly. I don't believe micro-updates are necessary, and more intrusive than welcome. What do you think?

Bulletins. For instant feedback, nothing beats a MySpace bulletin. Of course, only a small percentage of your friends will respond, so if you want a lot of responses you need a lot of friends.

Polls and Quizzes. I've posted a few quizzes on the Newbie's Blog, and just put a poll on my website because I was getting so many emails about the ending of my new Jack Daniels novel, Fuzzy Navel. People like to do more online than just read, and letting them interact and interface seems to get results.

Asking Questions. Seems obvious, but how often do you ask for readers to respond? If you want people to contact you, ask them to. Encourage this by soliciting their feedback with thoughtful questions, such as "How Many Newsletters Should an Author Send?" Seriously, I want your response on that. One or two a year? Three to eight a year? Once a month? Once a week?

Being Controversial. The blog post that receive the most comments are the ones where people disagree. I love it when people think I'm wrong. Conflict is interesting, and as long as it doesn't devolve into a flame war, differing opinions makes for great reading. Nothing heats up the blogosphere like taking sides on a hot issue.

Again, for any of these to work, you have to make sure that you're providing a good reason for people to visit you in the first place. So many agents and publishers tell authors to get a blog, and so many other tell them not to bother because they don't help. Both are right and wrong.

Online promotion will help, but only if you understand how it works, can set attainable goals, and are able to measure your effectiveness.

Of course, one of the best measures of effectiveness is feedback...

46 comments

Fix Your Billboard

I've been housekeeping for the last few weeks, tweaking my website, blog, and various online billboards.

An "online billboard" is a place on the Internet where you have a little bit of property people pass through.

I've been collecting online intersections lately, and have found I own a few beyond the obvious blog and website:

Joe on MySpace: www.myspace.com/jakonrath
Joe on Facebook: www.facebook.com/people/JA_Konrath/679343992
Joe on Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J._A._Konrath
Joe's Amazon blog: http://www.amazon.com/gp/blog/A1EF5ODLYYMZIU/ref=cm_blog_dp_artist_blog
Joe on Shelfari: http://www.shelfari.com/jakonrath
Joe on Goodreads: http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/137270.J_A_Konrath
Joe on CrimeSpace: http://crimespace.ning.com/profile/Konrath

Are writers really expected to keep up with all of these online billboards? Has it become part of our job description to maintain and stay active in all of these social networking forums?

Well, no. Unless you want to attract more readers.

As writers, we have to go where the readers are. That's why we have websites in the first place, because a lot of people have computers and Internet access.

But when writers try to figure out how to maximize their Internet access, laziness seems to kick in. There are a hundred other things they could be doing other than strengthening their online billboards, and there's no real tangible evidence that a Facebook pages helps sell books in the first place.

Or is there?

Let's take a step back and consider the history of the old-fashioned billboard.

Billboards, for the uninitiated, are those large advertising signs posted along highways. They're usually target specific, announcing an upcoming store or attraction several miles ahead. Unlike TV and radio commercials or print ads, billboards actually lead you to the item they're promoting.

Being a Chicagoan, we often vacationed in Wisconsin, and driving up I-94 was billboard mania, announcing dozens of attractions at the resort town the Dells. Some of those Tommy Bartlett Watershow boards still exist 30 years later, and I can't help but wonder if Tommy is now doing his ski jumps with the aid of a walker.

The point is, unlike other forms of advertising that suggest a product or service and then require you to make the effort to seek out that product or service, billboards require little effort. All you had to do was take the proper exit.

As a result, roadside billboards continue to be a powerful source of revenue.

You see where I'm going with this.

Your MySpace page, your Shelfari profile, even your blog and website, are all billboards, pointing directly to links where your books can be purchased.

The more billboards pointing to your books, the more roads they're on, the more people you'll lure in.

So, yes, you should take a few minutes every few days to check to make sure your billboard is still up, attracting people. You should perform some basic maintenance, just as replying to questions and updating information. You might even make the billboard larger by participating to a greater degree. And naturally, your billboard isn't about what you're trying to sell. It's about what you're offering: information and entertainment.

Don't want to do that work? No one says you have to. But I never would have seen Tommy Bartlett if he hadn't made a similar effort. Me and 20 million others. Pretty good traffic for the cost and maintenance of a few dozen billboards.

If you're a regular visitor of this blog, you'll notice the Blogs I Read sidebar has gotten smaller. That's because, in the course of housekeeping, I got rid of the dead links.

Over thirty of them.

Those billboards were dead. No longer luring anyone to anything. Worthless, even though they may still be linked to by many search engines and places on the world wide web.

Blogging isn't for everyone. Social networking sites aren't for everyone.

But why put up a billboard and then leave it to fall apart and whither away?

When was the last time you updated your blog or website? When was the last time you visited that forum, or networking page, or any other billboards you took the time to build?

Anything worth doing is worth doing right. If you don't see the value to billboards, that's fine. But to fully understand the value of something requires you to try your best and give it a fair shot.

Are your billboards all they can be?

13 comments

Revamping Your Website

I finally paid a professional to create a website for me.

My previous website was my own Frankenstein creation. And much like the monster, it was large, unwieldy, and unpleasant to look at.

I liked the content, but the presentation was lacking. I used html, which has since been replaced by better design languages. My site had different looks on different browsers, some better than others. I had a lot of unneeded, sloppy code that caused errors.

So I hired a designer to drag me into the 21st century.

My take on websites may be a bit peculiar. I don't like busy-looking web pages, or graphic-intensive sites that have Flash intros —I always skip the intro, and get impatient when a site takes a while to load.

I wanted something simple, easy to navigate, that I could maintain and update myself. I also wanted to remove some obsolete text content and add pictures and videos and a few other bells and whistles.

What I've lost:

- My writing tips pages, which were redundant because the tips are now collected in my Newbie's Guide to Publishing e-book.
- Free stories, which were redundant because they've been collected in my 55 Proof e-book.
- Some reviews and old news.
- Three pages of pictures.

What I've gained:

- A simple, easy to navigate page.
- Three times as many pictures, using www.slide.com.
- A guestbook.
- Several new videos and movies.
- A new store.
- A site for my pen name, Jack Kilborn.
- A message board, with chat.

In other words, a lot of extra content in a smaller, easier to access amount of space. I went from having over 25 pages to about 10.

When you're looking to redo (or create) a website, here are some things to keep in mind.

1. Understand what your site it for. It isn't a 24 hour advertisement. It's more like a 24 hour hotel, where people can visit and have a pleasant stay. Websites are all about information and entertainment, not commercials.

2. Decide what you want. Do this by looking at other websites and dissecting the reasons you like them (or don't like them.) What makes a site appealing? What makes it sticky? What makes you come back time and again?

3. Set a price. Websites can cost anywhere from hundreds to thousands of dollars. Figure out what pages you need and what you want on them, and a designer should be able to give you an estimate.

4. Find a designer. I used Jack Passarella, at www.authorpromo.com. Jack happens to be an author, so he has a good take on what an author website should do. I liked his style, and I enjoyed working with him. It took several weeks for him to fit me into his queue (good designers usually have a waiting list), but once he did he completed the site in just a few days. He has an easy-going yet professional manner and is reasonably priced.

5. Learn how to do some things for yourself. Having a working knowledge of domains, ftp, html, css, and php can only help you as an author. Being able to fix, tweak, and update your own site saves a ton of money, and is often quicker than working with a webmaster.

If you want to see the difference between new and old, here's your chance.

New Site **Old Site**

Let me know what you think...

26 comments

More On Net Promotion

I've found myself in an odd position this last week. I'm in between projects and have some free time, so I've been messing around with the Internet. After catching up on emails and link exchanges I've begun trying various short-term promo efforts and attempting to gauge their success rates.

Here are some things I've found.

Book Trailers - Four days ago I uploaded a book trailer I made for my latest Jack Daniels novel, Fuzzy Navel. You might want to reread the original blog post (from August 1) because I just added some thoughts to it. While I wouldn't call the trailer hugely successful, it's been seen several hundred times and I've gotten several dozen favorable responses on it. The trailer cost nothing to produce, and only took about an hour to shoot and edit, and right after posting here, on my website, and on MySpace and Facebook, my Amazon numbers spiked from 50,000 to 10,000.

Let me reiterate that Amazon doesn't sell that many books, so this uptick only accounted for a few extra sales. But these were sales I didn't have prior to the trailer, and they cost me nothing but a little time.

Videos also have a lobster trap effect —-a lobster pot, left in the ocean, is an eternal killing machine. Lobster crawls in to get bait, dies, becomes bait for next lobster. A video can keep killing for years. My Hermes the Bat video has had thousands of hits, and I still get email about it on a regular basis.

My question for you folks is: Should I post this video on Amazon? Too silly and unprofessional, or irreverent enough to make some new fans?

For those who've never read it, my Amazon blog is **HERE.** It is viewable by anyone who looks at one of my books, and videos can be uploaded.

Facebook - I've begun to approach Facebook with the same verve I approached MySpace with a few years ago. This means that every day I'm inviting a few dozen people to befriend me, I'm replying to messages and email, and I'm adding to my profile so it isn't so bare-bones.

I confess I don't really "get" a lot of the Facebook standbys, like pokes and the many little applications, which seem a lot like passing notes in grammar school. But other people seem to dig it, and as writers we need to go where the people are. Like your website, your Facebook page should be sticky. This means you have things to offer rather than things to sell, and the two main things you can offer are information and entertainment.

I'll report on Facebook again in the upcoming weeks as I play with it .

MySpace - I'm really liking MySpace lately. Back when I first joined, I bought a program called **Friendblaster Pro** for a few bucks, which assists in sending out Friend Requests. Then the administrators got tough on spammers and began to force Captcha codes on bulk requesters, and I tapered off.

But the fact is, even with Captcha codes, Friendblaster is still much faster than adding friends one at a time. Plus, Friendblaster can also send out messages and comments in bulk.

In The Newbie's Guide To Publishing Book, in the Internet section, I listed a few of my MySpace bulletins. A bulletin is an post that is viewable by all of your friends. I've found them to be an effective way to get the word out about upcoming events or announcements.

But I believe that bulk comments are even more effective. When you leave a comment, it appears on your friend's page, for others to read and click on. This is like placing your ad on billboards across town, as many as 500 a day (the limit MySpace allows.)

Yesterday, as an experiment, I used Friendblaster to harvest the addresses of my friends who have commented on my MySpace page. Then I used Friendblaster to post this comment on their pages:

Just stopping by to say hi.

Okay, that's a big lie. I'm really sending you this because I want you and people who look at your page to buy my books.

There. I said it. You're just a cheap promo opportunity for me. I'm even using a bot to send out hundreds of these comments rather than taking the time to contact you personally.

But I also love you. A lot. You're my very favorite MySpace friend. Really. Thank you for being you.

My latest book is Fuzzy Navel.

I sent this out to 300 people. Took about an hour of sitting in front of the computer, occasionally punching in a Captcha code. My efforts resulted in over fifty comments and emails in reply, all favorable, and another spike in my Amazon numbers.

A huge success? No. But not bad for an hour of work, which wasn't really work because I was on the computer anyway.

Pictures - My website is currently being overhauled, and I was wondering what to do about the three pages of photos I have up there. The pages take a while to load, and I believe three pages is too many —my goal is to streamline my site and make it easier to navigate. So I bounced around the net and discovered www.Slide.com.

If you want to post pictures on your site, blog, MySpace, etc. this is the easiest way to do it. It's also free.

I'm going to pop this onto my website, along with another one that features all of my book covers, plus a viewer for my Youtube videos, a few Google videos of old college movie projects, and a Guestbook, also courtesy of Slide.com. So three pages of pics becomes a single multi-media page that actually loads quicker.

If you've found any cool or effective net promo ideas or gadgets, let me know...

18 comments

Fuzzy Navel Book Trailer

I finally succumbed to the latest trend and sold a kidney for $32,994 to produce a book trailer —-the most expensive book trailer of all time.

With no false modesty, I know it was worth it. I'm thrilled with the result, which is a masterpiece of subtlety and persuasion. I'm sure it will catapult me onto the bestseller lists and beyond.

8/4/08 Update

Okay, now that most of my regulars have seen the trailer, I wanted to blog a bit about what I think about book trailers.

In a nutshell: not much.

I'll elaborate. A movie trailer (in most cases) uses visuals from the movie it is promoting in order to inform audiences that it is coming soon. This works because the visuals are a preview of the film, taken from the film.

People like coming attractions for many reasons. First, because of location. A preview comes before a movie, and usually the preview is similar in tone to the movie you just paid to see. Trailers are part of the movie-going experience.

A good film trailer makes you aware that a film exists, tells you when it will be available to see, and is often recognizable somehow. By recognizable I mean that the audience is often familiar with the actor, director, or franchise. Or perhaps the audience is only familiar with the genre, and because they paid to see a movie of the same genre, many will have an interest in the preview.

A book trailer, on the other hand, has none of these advantages.

First, it uses a visual hook for a media made up of no visuals. A trailer is a mini-movie. A book is not a movie, it is words on a page.

Second, a book trailer's location is artificial and requires active rather than passive effort. The best trailer for a book would be a printed excerpt in the book itself. But instead, book trailers aren't packaged with books —-they're placed on author websites and YouTube. Chances are you have to be looking for the trailer in order to find it, so that cuts down on the number of exposures, especially to the uninitiated. Your goal is to reach people who haven't heard of you. I don't know anyone who goes looking for book trailers, other than authors.

Third, book trailers can cost lots of money, yet I have never bought a book based on a trailer. I use what works on me, and these simply don't.

Fourth, even really good book trailers pale next to movie trailers. Yes, Flash can be cool. But it still looks like a cheap inbred cousin to the Hollywood produced previews.

Fifth, a trailer is essentially an ad. That's what I'm satirizing in the Fuzzy Navel trailer. Thirty seconds of video that screams "Buy me" isn't going to sway the average viewer any more than a print ad or TV commercial, and the effectiveness of those ads is very low.

That said, there are some things good about book trailers.

1. Anything that you put on the internet is a trap that can keep catching surfers for years.

2. Trailers are still a new type of promotion, so there is a certain amount of buzz about them.

3. Publishers seem to like trailers, and anything that can get your publisher behind your book is a Good Thing.

Ultimately, I do not recommend that new authors invest their promo dollars in book trailers, or in any other type of ad. Instead, use your budget to attend conferences and visit as many bookstores as possible, signing stock and meeting booksellers and fans.

But if your publisher wants to buy one, or you're making a lot of money, you might as well give trailers a shot. They're one more weapon in a writer's self-promotion arsenal. Not a great weapon, but if you're doing everything else this is one more thing to try.

27 comments

Casting Your Net

I just joined a few more online billboards.

This means, besides my blog and website, I'm maintaining 12 other hubs on the Internet. If you're curious, here are all the links:

Joe's Amazon blog: http://www.amazon.com/gp/blog/A1EF5ODLYYMZIU/ref=cm_blog_dp_artist_blog
Joe on Facebook: www.facebook.com/people/JA_Konrath/679343992
Joe on CrimeSpace: http://crimespace.ning.com/profile/Konrath
Joe on Goodreads: http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/137270.J_A_Konrath
Joe on ITW: http://www.thrillerwriters.org/connect/JA%20Konrath/
Joe on LinkedIn: http://www.linkedin.com/in/JoeKonrath
Joe on MySpace: www.myspace.com/jakonrath
Joe on RedRoom: http://www.redroom.com/author/ja-konrath
Joe on Shelfari: http://www.shelfari.com/jakonrath
Joe on Squidoo: http://www.squidoo.com/jakonrath
Joe on Twitter: http://www.twitter.com/jakonrath
Joe on Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J._A._Konrath

Some require more maintenance than others. MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter lead the pack, needing to be updated almost daily. Others, such as Goodreads, Shelfari, RedRoom, and Crimespace, are fine to check up on once a week. The resy are mostly sites I can visit once a month. Squidoo and Lijit can be set up to practically run themselves.

Of course, the more time you spend on each of these, the more effective it becomes as a billboard.

At this point, I'm fine with having a toehold in each of these communities. People join them looking for books, or friends, or just something to entertain or inform, and I've made it easy for them to find something that fits the bill: Me.

That's the first step. But to truly take advantage of Internet relationships, the next step involves time. Time to seek out people on these sites. Time to announce yourself on them. Time to respond to those who have contacted you.

But is it worthwhile?

As the world continues its race into a digital future, it is becoming more and more common to have relationships with people you never actually meet in real life. And unlike real life, these relationships often have less baggage and more leeway. You aren't required to do as much, give as much, or be as responsible with online friends as with real life friends.

And yet, your online friends can vastly outnumber your real life friends, and they can also be a gigantic feather in your self-promotion cap. They can help spread the word. They can buy your books.

I've mentioned many times that people are searching for two things on the Internet: Information and Entertainment. While a visual medium, the net is still all about words. You enter words into Google. You read words in response.

Who better to blaze a trail in this frontier than people skilled to use words?

Your words, in the form of communication and correspondence, are a very effective way to garner supporters online. Your words, when advising and entertaining, will help to keep these relationships going, and are also helping to build relationships with people who you don't even know exist.

The majority of folks who visit my blog and website and billboards are lurkers. They stop by. They read. And if they like what the read, they often buy my books. All without ever letting me know.

It's great to have cheerleaders, linking to you, mentioning you, corresponding with you. But it's also great to have a silent audience who doesn't ask for more than the time you've already given creating a blog or homepage or billboard.

So I don't mind maintaining these billboards. And as more social networking sites spring up and gain popularity, I'll go there as well. I want to be where the people are. I have information and entertainment to give them, but it is only useful to them if they know it exists.

11 comments

Back Up!

First things first, the winners of the AFRAID free book contest were posted on my forum, in the AFRAID CONTEST heading, http://www.jakonrath.com/phpBB3.

Now, in the spirit of Halloween, I want to talk about the scariest thing that can happen to writers:

Losing our writing.

Data corruption, hard drive failure, viruses, operating systems failing to boot, power outages, and computer crashes can all cause our words to disappear forever.

My computer recently crashed, big time. It has crashed before (thank you Bill Gates) but I've always managed to recover data. But this was the mother of all crashes, my hard drive became corrupted, and I lost everything.

Luckily, because I was expecting this to happen eventually, I backed all of my writing up, so I didn't lose anything other than a few emails.

So here are my tips for all writers, for both before and after a crash, so they may never lose data to system instability.

BEFORE THE CRASH

You will lose data one day. It is inevitable. But if you plan for the eventuality, your data loss will be minor. Here's what all writers need to do.

1. Buy a UPS Back Up. There are many makes and models (I use an APC), but they start at only $40 and all writers should have one for their desktop. These are basically glorified power strips, that not only protect against power surges that could fry your computer, but also have a battery in them so they guard against power outages. Even if your electricity goes out while you're working on something, you'll still have time to save data.

2. www.Mozy.com. This is a free program that saves 2GB of your data off site. You set it to automatically save at a predetermined time of day, and even if your house burns down, you can get your data back.

3. MS Word. The latest version of this, and pretty much all word processing software, has Autosave and Autorecover functions. This means that your work is saved automatically while you're writing it, in a separate spot from where it is normally saved. These shadow copiues can often be recovered even when your original copies are lost.

4. External HDD. Back up to an external hard drive, in case your primary drive fails. If you don't have one, look into partitioning your hard drive. Your operating system is probably installed on your C: drive. If C: becomes corrupted, your data on it —even back up data —could be lost. But if you create a, E: or F: partition, and back up to that, your data should be safe even if C: becomes unstable. But having an entirely separate drive is a better way to go.

5. Hard Copies. Keep printed copies of all your work. Printing work in progress also helps witht he editing process, as going at a hard copy with a red pen is still the preferable way for editors to work.

6. Pen Drives, CDs, and Email. Have a pen drive on your keychain, and to back up your writing there in case someone breaks into your house and steals your computer and extrenal hard drive. Burn CDs and DVDs of all your important files. Email your strories to yourself, or to a family member,

7. Backup Now. Vista, for all its flaws, does have an easy, automatic way to back up files. The Backup Now feature enables users to automatically save any of their date once every 24 hours. At Drive>Properties>Tools you'll find this feature. Back up to a different partition, or even better, and external HDD.

8. www.Avast.com. Why pay for Norton Antivirus when Avast is less buggy, offers just as much protection, and is free? And while you're protecting your computer from trojans, viri, and worms, also protect against spyware and adware by going to www.pcworld.com and downloading the free programs Spybot and AdAware.

AFTER THE CRASH

If you followed any of the above suggestions, recovering your writing should be a snap. But if you were lackadaisical in your safety protocol, there are still ways to hopefully recover your lost words.

1. Read Iris. I love this OCR program. If you have a copy of your writing printed out, you can use this and a scanner, and it translates the typed words into a text file. No more retyping.

2. System Restore. If you can't boot your computer, you might be able to get things started again using this function. Tap F8 repeatedly when you start your computer, and rather than booting it will give you the option of starting in Safe Mode, or doing a System Restore to an earlier time (or loading Last Known Good Configuration.) Windows does this automatically, so before you run to the Geek Squad, try this out.

3. Startup Repair. If Vista doesn't start, it tries to fix itself by loading Startup Repair. If this won't load, there are repair disks available for free online (of if you have a hard copy of Vista you can use the install disk.) If this can't repair your computer, it will allow you to run the command prompt, and you can run a check disk which will try to fix itself. First type in C: (or whatever drive is buggy), then "chkdsk /r" without the quotes.

4. Active Boot Disk. This is free. You burn it onto a CD, and it functions as an operating system from your CD drive. This means you can try to repair your HDD, or even remove files from it, even if you can't launch Windows.

5. Spybot and AdAware. If your system caught something bad, you can clean it using these free aforementioned programs.

If you've never listened to another thing I've ever said, trust me on this: when it comes to losing your writing, and ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Use as many of these as you can. And if you have any ways I missed, put them in the comments to share with others.

28 comments

Becoming Cyber-Effective

It's been said that 50% of all advertising is effective, and the other 50% isn't. But the problem is that no one can guess which 50% is which.

While it's a tidy little axiom that makes excuses for why ad campaigns fail to generate expected results, it's still a little off.

In my last post, I talked about things that writers have no control over, and a few things they do.

One of the things you do have a measure of control over is your Internet presence.

Brand-building and name-recognition are important for authors. Once we sell a novel to a publisher, we have to sell it to readers. If they like the book, they become brand-loyal, and we become an automatic purchase.

For that to happen, readers first have to know a book exists, then they have to read it, and finally, they have to like it enough to buy the next one.

Publishing, as a model, functions very much like an all-you-can-eat buffet restaurant. There are a certain number of items for consumption, and personal taste and quality dictate which items move the fastest.

Of course the most important aspect —getting on the table in the first place —plays the biggest role. The bigger the quantity, the more restaurants a food appears in, the more it will be consumed.

We writers don't have much control over how big our print runs are, or how wide our distribution is. That wonderful food that buffet-goers might love to devour must be available first. Sadly, most books don't get big print runs and distribution, which limits the amount of people they can reach.

Writers have some control over a book's quality, but who likes the book and wants to keep reading the author is largely subjective, and also beyond a writer's control.

So how can a writer brand themselves when distribution and quality are crapshoots?

They can follow advertising's lead, and discover on their own what people want and what works by conducting studies, comparison, and analyzing data.

Here are some tools and I use and ways I measure my cyber-effectiveness.

What I Want to Know - Do people like my writing?

Tools Used- Email, personal appearances, message boards, blog comments, reviews.

How I Know How I'm Doing - Fan email can be an indicator of how well people are responding to your book. In this day and age, if someone emails you about your writing, this is a huge coup. It isn't like a reader can press a button embedded in a book and immediately contact an author. So those who do this have a compulsion to do so, which implies passion. To read a book and like it so much that one logs onto the

Internet, Googles an author, and writes them a personal message, is a powerful indicator of how much that book affected them.

Frequency of email depends on distribution/print run, naturally, but it also can measure a book's effectiveness. Divide your print run by the number of people who contact you.

You can also browse Amazon.com, GoodReads.com, Shelfari.com, and many other sites where readers post reviews. Got a lot of reviews that you didn't directly solicit? Then your book is striking a chord.

If you have any sort of crowd at a signing or appearance, your writing is important to people.

If people are discussing your books in a forum, listserv, Yahoo Group, or message board, that indicates passion, and passion in one person often means passion in many, which indicates you're doing something right.

If I divide my sales by the number of people who somehow reach me or talk about me, I get around ten to fifteen percent feedback.

This is high. But the number is skewed. Much of the feedback comes from people who have read several of my titles, and may contact me/review me after each title. But if you know you've sold ten thousand books, and you've only gotten two hundred people offering feedback, you should know that your writing isn't as effective as it could be.

Remember that being contacted is its own form of distribution. The more places/easier it is to contact/review you, the more you're going to be contacted/reviewed.

Beside email and this blog, I make it easy for people to find me using the many billboards and social networking sites I've listed in the sidebar. I have a forum, and use polls on my website, and maintain Facebook and MySpace pages, doing all I can to facilitate feedback.

If people aren't contacting you, make it easier for them to do so, and make sure both your writing and persona encourages it.

What I Want to Know - Are people finding me on the net?

Tools Used - Hit counters, download trackers, social networking.

How I Know How I'm Doing - First of all, content is king. People on the Internet are looking for two things, information and entertainment. As a writer, you're uniquely suited to provide both.

The more you provide, the more Googleable you become. The words I'm writing right now will be searchable a decade from now, still drawing people to this post. Some drawn here will read, some readers will seek out my books, some of those people will become fans, and some of those fans will become buyers. It's a trickle down effect, but it works.

You control your content. If you're a blogger, are you blogging about something people are interested in? Timely topics may get hits in the short run, but universal topics tend to keep finding viewers long after they've been posted.

This blog has its share of both timely and universal posts. Newbie writers come here from around the world, as evidenced by my Feedjit Live Traffic Map widget in the sidebar. This widget shows me, at a glance, how universal my posts are.

For a more specific demographic breakdown, I use Statcounter.com, which lets me know who is visiting and how long they stay, among other valuable info. I can see what topics generate the most hits.

My website has many free downloads. By offering books (entertainment) for free, I'm basically like a buffet restaurant that offers free samples —a certain percentage will like the sample, then come in and eat.

I use bfnsoftware.com to track my downloads. People have downloaded about twenty thousand copies of my ebooks since I began tracking. A huge number? No. But these books keep attracting new visitors, and creating new fans, with no real ongoing effort on my part.

Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter, among many other social networking sites, allow you to reach out to people, and vice versa. The reason I have a lot of online "friends" on these sites is because I put in the time to find them. The higher your friend count, the more people you can potentially reach with announcements.

But like your website and blog, this is all about content. What you have to offer dictates how many people on these sites will care when you do have an announcement like a signing, new book release, or contest.

If they really like you, you become prominently displayed on their social networking page. This is free advertising, leading others to you.

What I Want to Know - Are people linking to me on the net?

Tools Used - Other blogs and websites, search engine rankings, Google Alerts, link exchanges.

How I Know How I'm Doing - When writers ask me about blogs, or MySpace, or websites, they think these are magic bullets and all they must do is open an account for the traffic to come pouring in and name-recognition to blossom.

Well, no. As I've mentioned many times, you have to give people what they want if you want them to visit, and they want information and entertainment. You also have to make an effort trying to find these people.

If you're just starting out, one thing to do is visit popular sites, contribute information and entertainment, and offer a link back to your site. Say something smart or funny on another person's blog or message board, and people will check your profile, and your site, and if they like what they see they'll bookmark you or link to you.

If you're already established, offer content to other sites for free. Guest blogging, doing interviews, and providing short stories are all ways to spread name-recognition.

One of the ways to judge if people are talking about you (rather than to you) is by using marketleap.com. This free site allows you to check your search engine saturation, and how many other sites link to you.

Technorati.com, Digg.com, Delicious, and other social bookmarking sites allow people to point you out to even more people. Making it easy for folks to bookmark you, link to you, subscribe to your feed, or tell

others about you, means more people will find you. Hence the two new widgets you see on the bottom of this post.

I've set up Google Alerts for JA Konrath and Jack Kilborn. This isn't out of vanity. It's so I can see what I'm doing that is important enough for people to mention. If you Google Alert yourself and you don't get any hits for several days, you aren't doing enough online. I average 4 to 10 alerts a day. That's more than many authors, not nearly as many as some. How do I know? You can set up Google Alerts to search for any term, including your peers' names. Marketleap.com allows the same thing.

You should NEVER compare yourself to other authors when it comes to things out of your control: advances, print runs, publicity, awards, reviews, etc. But you can and should see how effective your branding and name-recognition techniques are compared to theirs. Not for bragging rights, but as a learning tool.

I know I've written an effective blog post if a lot of people link to it and comment. The more people who link to you, the more traffic you get. It isn't by chance that both my blog and website have lots of links.

Links not only bring in traffic, they also raise your search engine ranking. Remember that your ultimate goal is to become known to complete strangers. The more places you appear, in person and in cyberspace, the better your chances at being discovered, read, and bought.

Sales are not the only indicator of how well we're doing as writers. They're just one statistic. While sales may be the ultimate goal, and that goal may be influenced by factors beyond your control (like print run, distribution, and publisher marketing dollars), you can and should be influencing the other statistics I mentioned here.

You can write a book, cross your fingers, and hope your publisher pushes it.

You can write a book, cross your fingers, and hope it magically catches on with the public.

Or you can write a book and put in the time to make people aware of your book, which will perhaps influence how well it catches on with the public, and maybe even prompt your publisher into pushing it.

Landing a book deal is luck. Becoming a bestseller is luck. Getting 50,000 hits on Google when someone searches for your name is hard work.

Becoming cyber-effective is within your control. All it takes is time, savvy, and attention to content. And as writers, you should be paying attention to content in the first place.

21 comments

Helping Each Other

Let's talk about the Internet, and why it is the greatest invention in the history of mankind.

Our success as a species has to do with a lot of things. Opposable thumbs. Large brains. Walking upright. Making tools and fire and wheels.

But the thing that allowed us to spread across the planet is language.

Language allows us to communicate with one another. Communication means we can cooperate better and share information. But this isn't the telephone, where the words are lost to time, or a book which is dependent on a print copy only available to a finite number of people.

The Internet is permanent, and accessible by everyone.

What a gift for authors, who need a way to spread the word of their existence in order to survive.

And yet, I don't see many authors doing this to the degree they could or should. And fans, who anxiously await an author's next book, then wonder why the next book never comes (hint: it's because the author was dropped by their publisher.)

Well, I do my damnedest to help other authors. Here are some of the ways I try to:

1. Links. Look in the sidebar, or on my website, and you'll see I link to hundreds of blogs and websites. This isn't just an one-sided endorsement by me, because mutual links help raise Google rankings for sites that reciprocate.

2. Newsletters. In at least one newsletter a year, I recommend books written by my peers to my fans. Imagine if all authors did this.

3. Reviews. I review my friends. We all should.

4. I mention books by my peers when I do interviews and speak in public.

5. Pimping. This goes beyond links and mentions. With several of my buddies, I push their books, and push pretty hard.

6. Blogging. I've been known to interview other authors on occasion.

So why aren't all authors doing this?

We aren't in competition with one another. We're not all islands unto ourselves. It doesn't detract from our sales to mention someone else's book. In fact, fans like these recommendations.

If you're an author, look at your links. Look at your newsletter. Look at your blog. Check how often you mention other authors in general (and me in particular.)

And if you're a fan, the best thing you can do to ensure an author you like continues to get published is to tell other people about their books. Either in person, or online via reviews, social networks, forums, listservs, etc.

Just imagine how many new people we could reach if we pooled our efforts.

20 comments

Your Tack Hammer

A while ago I did a post on Internet Billboards.

Recently I was talking with a writing buddy, and he asked, "I'm on Facebook, now what the hell am I supposed to do with it?"

Like I always do, I made an analogy.

If you're making furniture, one of the tools you'll need is a tack hammer. The average Joe doesn't own a tack hammer, and doesn't need a tack hammer, because it's a specialized tool for a specific job.

Sure, a tack hammer can be probably be used for other applications. But it's used best by someone who understands what it should be used for. Don't buy one if you have no idea why you need it, because if you don't know why you need it, you won't use it properly.

MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, and many other billboards, are tack hammers. Specific tools for specific purposes.

And let me be 100% clear here that the specific purpose of billboards isn't to sell books.

Facebook isn't going to get you on the bestseller list. Yet many writers feel they need a Facebook page, so they set one up and then wonder what the hell the point is.

The point of these billboards is twofold.

First, it enlarges your Internet footprint. The more places you are, the more people are likely to find you.

Second, it makes it easier for people to stay connected to you. The more you remain in the forefront of people's minds, the better off your brand is.

As a writer, you are both a spokesperson and a product. Your book is also a product, but effective salesmanship is about selling you as much as it is about selling your book.

The majority of people who buy your book won't know you. But the Internet has shown that the number of people who *can* know you has increased tremendously.

For the first time in history, the distance between author and reader is a simple mouse click.

It is to a writer's advantage to befriend as many folks as possible, because you are the product as much as your books are.

But just owning the tack hammer doesn't mean you can automatically build furniture.

In order to enlarge your Internet footprint, broaden brand awareness and name recognition, and keep connected with people, you have to put in some time.

As I've said before, people are looking for two things on the net: information and entertainment. Your billboards should provide both.

But social interaction is also a form of entertainment. And it's a powerful one. I know, because it works on me, so I'm sure it works on others.

Last week, I got a Facebook recommendation to befriend Gary Brandner. Gary is a horror writer (he wrote The Howling, among many other great novels) and I have a dozen of his books on my shelf.

I hadn't thought about Mr. Brandner in years, but seeing that recommendation made me befriend him, and that led to me writing him a short email saying how much I enjoyed his work. That led to him kindly responding to my email, which made me feel all happy and fanboyish. So I wrote back, telling him which books of his I owned, asking if I missed any.

Gary mentioned one I missed. I went out and bought it.

All because of Facebook.

I'm sure this happens a lot. Knowing about an author and enjoying his books often leads to sales. But actually hearing directly from an author is even more powerful.

That means you have to do more than just post some pics and stories on your billboards. It means making an effort to communicate and correspond.

Answering messages, leaving comments, replying to email, befriending people, keeping your billboards updated, staying current, initiating contact; these are all effective ways to wield that tack hammer.

So wield away.

17 comments

Ebooks

Ebooks!

Seven years ago, ebooks were the Next Big Thing in publishing. Agents sold them for big bucks, publishers tripped all over themselves making sure they acquired the rights, and everyone was expectantly waiting for the day when the printing presses stopped forever because we all would be carrying libraries in the palm of our hands.

Well, it didn't happen.

Ebooks were published, in a variety of downloadable formats. But they never really took off. I blame several reasons:

1. They were overpriced. Who would pay $15 for a text download when they could buy the paperback for $8?
2. There was no standardization or universal compatibility. Different gizmos and websites used different formats.
3. The equipment wasn't user-friendly. Reading on a tiny screen isn't fun, and trying to adjust margins on a PDA is a pain.
4. Books are warmer. There's something about the feel of a book that people like, and they can drop it in the bathtub or take it to the beach without worrying about losing valuable electronic equipment.

So ebooks have arrived, but they don't seem to be doing much. On my last royalty statement, I believe I sold around five downloads.

But I think the tide is starting to change. People are more at ease with downloading content these days. The devices have gotten better, and less expensive. The **Amazon Shorts** program is getting customers to read on machines rather than on paper. Sony has released their long-awaited **Portable Reader System**. **Project Gutenberg** has almost 20,000 books available online. Google Book Search and Amazon offer searching through the content of books. And there's more and more websites that sell ebooks: www.ereader.com, www.ebooks.com, www.fictionwise.com, www.booksonboard.com, and dozens of others.

What does this mean for writers? Here are my predictions:

I predict that downloadable book sales (text, and especially audio) will continue to grow. People these days are either on their computers or traveling someplace, and both are conducive to reading.

I predict that books will become multimedia things like DVDs, offering more than just text (photos, music, video, interviews with the author, etc.) Print copies may soon be packaged with a DVD which contains a pdf or txt file. Downloads will have extra content, and will drop down in price.

I predict the viral nature of the Internet will help to create print bestsellers. Not necessarily through marketing or advertising, but through actual content. By this I mean giving the book away.

So I'm going to try it.

The savvy may have noticed the two book covers over the links in my sidebar. These covers lead to a new webpage on my site, which offers these books, in their entirety, for free.

I'm not the first person to try this. Matt Reilly released a YA adventure on his website in installments for free. Scott Sigler has been podcasting his books in installments. Stephen King wrote a story online in installments with mixed results. Douglas Clegg has been doing it for years. And there's an author whose name escapes me that will email you a story a week if you sign up for this service.

What I'm doing differently is giving away the whole thing at once. And I have a very specific reason for doing it this way.

I want to see what happens.

I'm a midlist author with a modest fanbase. Will that fanbase embrace the new technology? Will these freebies lead to new fans? Will this result in more website traffic, or publicity, or an increase in my print book sales? Will editors and movie producers start fighting over the rights?

Or am I giving away the milk, ensuring that I'll never sell the cow? Am I alienating my fans by giving them something other than Jack Daniels? Am I diluting my brand? Will I tick off my print publisher or my agent? Am I crazy to give away for free what I toiled over for years? Is this simply an exercise in vanity?

I truly dunno. But I've often thought that the best promotion in the world would be to give away 50,000 books. Get people hooked on the writing, and they'll become buyers. Like drugs.

I can't afford to do that. But I can give away ebooks.

I tried this in a limited way last year, for only a few weeks. Then I chickened out, worried about the many things I've mentioned above.

This time I'm going to stick with it until I'm able to draw some sort of conclusion.

So if you like James Rollins, Michael Crichton, and Preston & Child, check these books out —-they're in the same vein. And feel free to pass the word along to others.

I'll be watching my StatCounter, and checking my bandwidth, and seeing what happens. It should be interesting...

46 comments

E-Book vs Paper: Which Will Win?

Interested in reading BLOODY MARY, but you're super cheap?

Visit www.ereader.com on December 23rd, and you'll be able to download the entire book for free.

How does it work?

1. Visit http://promo.ereader.com/free
2. Fill in some basic info (they ask for a credit card, which is used as an unlock code to open the ebook —no charges are made to your card)
3. Download free eReader software to read the book (many different platforms available, for PCs, Macs, phones, TabletPCs, etc)
4. Download free book
5. Open eReader, open book (using your unlock code) and read

It's a clever little gadget. The text is pleasing and easy to read, and there are some cool features. I've never read an entire book on a computer, but this seems like a painless way to do so. I was leery about giving them a credit card number, but my publisher set up this promotion, so the whole thing is legitimate. The unlock code makes it impossible to share the book with others, preventing file swapping and copying, which is a clever way to protect copyright.

But the big question is: Is this the future of books?

I've thought it over, and have come up with a list of pros and cons.

WHERE E-BOOKS HAVE THE EDGE

COST - E-books are cheaper that print books.
SPEED OF PURCHASE - E-books can be downloaded instantly.
SPACE - Hundreds of E-books can be saved on a device the size of a single hardcover.
PORTABILITY - You can't carry a thousand print books around with you, but you can carry a laptop, tablet, or phone.
POTENTIAL - As E-Books evolve, expect pictures, sound FX, internet connectivity, and other cool things to enhance the reading experience.
ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY - No dead trees or harmful pollutants.

WHERE PRINT BOOKS HAVE THE EDGE

COLLECTIBILITY - People like to amass books (and author signatures.)
FEEL - The tactile pleasure of flipping pages is hard to beat electronically.
WORRY - If you drop you book in the bathtub, leave it on the bus, or set it on fire, it's no big loss. Dropping an E-Book would be bad.
LENDING - Lending books is fun, and many people do it religiously.

BROWSING - Going to libraries or bookstores is an event, surfing a website for dowloads is not.
SIMPLICITY - You don't need batteries, or an expensive gadget. You can read a book anywhere, anytime.
GIFTS - Have you ever bought a download for someone you love? Me neither.
READING TO CHILDREN - The bedtime story would be tough to do in front of a PC.

I don't fear that print books will disappear within my lifetime. While electronic reading will grow in popularity —I do more reading on my computer than I do in print, thanks to the Internet —it hasn't reached the point where it is superior to print books.

A song is a product. It can be delivered to a customer on vinyl, cassette, reel to reel, 8 track, CD, MP3, WMA download, and played on a Walkman, and Ipod, a computer, a record player, a home entertainment system, etc.

A book is a product. But for hundred of years, it could only be delivered to a customer as... a book. The product and the method of delivery were the same.

The electronic age brings a new method of delivery. With music or film, the delivery methods have continued to improve in quality, speed, and convenience.

But watching a movie or listening to music are passive activities. Reading is active. It involves not only involvement with the story, but also with the medium in which the story is presented. Holding a book, reading at your speed, skipping sections, rereading favorite parts, putting it down and picking it up, pausing to reflect, imagining the scene, pretending you're the main character, reading the ending first — these are the pleasures of reading that go beyond the product of written words.

Until technology advances to the point where the delivery system allows for the same experience, print books will remain the prefered method of delivery.

23 comments

More on Ebooks

Looking for some suggestions.

I've been talking with my print publisher, Hyperion, about giving away free ebooks in the Jack Daniels series.

I've been an active believer of Internet promotion since I first became a writer. My blog gets over 20,000 unique hits every month, my website gets almost as many, I have 13,000 MySpace friends, 10,000 people who have signed up for my mailing list, and if you Google "JA Konrath" you get 143,000 hits.

I try to maintain a large Internet presence, because more and more people are using the net. According to http://www.internetworldstats.com, there are more than 1.1 billion Internet users.

The more I do on the Internet, the likelier chance I have of people finding me. The more people that find me, the more who will read me. And, of course, the publishing industry has known for years that a certain percentage of readers will become buyers. Publishers give away millions of ARCs and galleys, hoping they will be read and talked about.

Which brings me to ebook downloads.

An ebook costs nothing to manufacture or distribute. It can be copied by pressing a button, and sent around the world by pressing another button.

And yet, for all the excitement about ebooks a decade ago, they aren't really big sellers. In fact, looking at past royalty statements, I haven't sold many ebooks.

The reason is threefold:

1. Ebooks are too expensive. Readers don't want to pay $16.95, or even $6.95, for a text download, when they can buy the print book for the same price. And the print book is easier to read.

2. Too many formats and restrictions. Consumers need special equipment and programs, and books that can be read on one device can't be read on another device. Some ebooks can't be printed, or put on two computers at once. It's confusing, and not user-friendly.

3. The majority of book buyers don't care much about the Internet. That's slowly changing. But I've spoken at over a hundred events, and I have had thousands of fans show up to see me, and I always ask them how many have visited my website. Surprisingly few have. Mystery readers buy print books, not ebooks. They don't care if an author has a website.

By giving ebooks away for free, I don't want to turn my print readers into ebook readers. That isn't going to happen, because my average reader (a woman in her mid-fifties) isn't going to give up the joy of reading a book on the beach to hunch over her computer to read. She doesn't have a Blackberry or a PDA or a Palm Pilot, nor does she want one.

I want to reach the audience that is already online —-the Internet people —-and turn them into print book fans. And I want to do this by giving away free ebooks.

If you Google "ebooks" you get 50 million hits. People are reading online. But, based on my ebook sales, my fans aren't among them.

Giving away free ebooks will help reach this potential audience. And as my audience increases, so will my print sales. Here's why:

First, because people who wouldn't read me normally will give me a try if it is free. Some of those people will become fans. Fans who talk about me, buy my books as gifts, and even buy copies for themselves.

Second, because not many people like to read entire books online, there is a percentage that will read some of it, then go out and buy the book to read it in the bathtub, on the beach, before bed, etc. People are likelier to download a full ebook than simply an excerpt, because there is a perception of greater value. An exceprt is a teaser to get someone to buy a book. A free ebook is a gift, and the attitude towards free ebooks is warmer and more welcoming.

Third, because this will help me reach an audience I haven't been able to reach. I've been to the mystery conventions. I've won some mystery awards. The mystery fans already know who I am. But how do I reach the larger audience? The regular fans?

I know I can reach thousands of people on the Internet. I can do this without spending a lot of money. And it won't cost Hyperion much, because my backlist ebooks haven't been selling very well.

This is cheaper than print advertising. Cheaper than touring. And I'll do most of the work.

Here's my plan:

I'd like to make WHISKEY SOUR, BLOODY MARY, and RUSTY NAIL available for free on my website, blog, and MySpace page.

I'll use two formats, pdf and HTML, as these are universal and able to be used on the most devices. Downloads will be handled on my site.

I'll encourage folks to download these files, and share these files with their friends and family. Business author Seth Godin did this with his first ebook, UNLEASHING THE IDEAVIRUS, and went on to become a bestseller in print. Sci-fi author Cory Doctorow has had hundreds of thousands of free ebook downloads, and still sells like crazy in print. The publisher Baen/Tor has had an ebook program for years. Dave Weber's novel ON BASILISK STATION has been available for free for several months. Over that time it's become Baen's most popular backlist title in paper.

Naturally, the fear is if we give away ebooks, people won't buy the print copies. I believe the opposite is true. When Napster (the original file sharing site where teenagers traded their music online) closed down, CD sales did not go up as expected. Sales went down. Getting music for free didn't prevent sales, instead it encouraged people to try new music, which they then went out and bought.

I'm read for free in libraries all the time. And many of those people who discover me at the library later buy my books.

I believe that ebooks are another way to get noticed, and get read. Publishers spend a lot of money on marketing and promotion. Here's a way to spread name-recognition and brand-awareness for free.
I'd really like to give it a shot. If I'm wrong, and my sales go way down, we've learned something. If I'm right, we've figured out a new, inexpensive way to promote authors.

Hyperion decided on a compromise. They're allowing me to give away 1000 downloads of one of my backlist titles, and see how that goes.

In order to do this effectively, I need to know several things.

1. Which book should I give away? The first book in the series makes the most sense. But giving away the newest book might spur more interest in that book.

2. How should I go about giving these 1000 away? I have a blog, website, newsletter, and MySpace page to do so. Should this be a contest? Or should they go to the first 1000 people who respond?

3. How can I leverage this to get as much bang for my buck as possible? Enlist other bloggers? Draft a press release? Take out a few ads?

Let me hear your ideas and suggestions. You might be doing something like this for yourself, someday soon...

36 comments

Stealing

If you've ever stolen anything, raise your hand.

I'm typing one-handed right now.

Yes, I'm a thief. Me and millions of other people worldwide all share the same particular brand of larceny.

We download stuff for free.

Now let's get the legal argument out of the way right now. Copying media, whether it is burning a CD you got from the library, lending your mom your VHS recordings of House, borrowing your friend's Microsoft Office key, or downloading JA Konrath's audiobook version of Bloody Mary on Demonoid.com, all of that is stealing. You do it, you break the law.

Now that we're clear that anything you get for free that normally costs money is stealing, we can (if we desire) approach the moral argument. Is it stealing if there is no actual theft of property?

On one hand, digital media is a bunch of 1s and 0s, which can freely be duplicated and distributed. On the other hand, the originator of the material deserves to be compensated for her efforts.

Morality isn't black and white. Never has been. History has shown that morals are dictated by the majority of any given population at any given time.

Now, in the age of Internet and digital copies, more and more people are sharing data. Movies, video games, computer programs, TV shows, music.

And books.

Books have two main digital formats, e-books and audiobooks. And if you go to the usual places, you will find both formats being shared in substantial, growing numbers.

Chances are, if you're published on audio or as an e-book, you're being stolen.

Usenet is a huge, untrackable source of this piracy, to the tune of 1.8 billion downloads a day. Yeah, I said billion.

Among the top 200 visited websites on the Internet are Rapidshare.com, Megaupload.com, Badongo.com, Mininova.com, Mediafire.com, ThePirateBay.org, ZShare.net, 4Shared.com, IsoHunt.com, Easy-Share.com, Torrentz.com, and FileFactory.com. These are file sharing sites, either using Bit Torrent technology or password-protected file lockers. They're getting millions of hits a day.

Other p2p sites include Kazaa, Limewire, eMule, Gnutella, Kademlia, Megaupload, Overnet, FastTrack, and Ares Galaxy, while other bit torrent sites include BTjunkie, isoHunt, myBittorrent, Torrentz, Suprnova, and Jamendo.

At any given minute, tens of millions of pieces of digital media are being stolen.

And I'm okay with that.

I've long been a proponent of the "give it away for free" school of thought.

I want fans. I find fans in libraries, where 300 people can read my book with me earning no more than the original $3.00 royalty on the hardcover sale. Why wouldn't I want to reach 1000s of people?

"But," the naysayers yell, "you own the copyright. You should be the one to decide who gets your books. I should be allowed make that decision for myself."

Well, go ahead. Make your decision. Then decide what you're going to do when you discover people are stealing your work anyway.

Copyright isn't enforceable in a digital world. Digital media wants to be free. You can object legally, morally, spiritually, however you want to. People are still going to trade and copy your work, and you aren't going to be paid for it.

Changing public opinion isn't an option. People are going to keep sharing files and downloading content for free. No public awareness campaign, stiffer laws, or tougher media encryption is going to change that. People who would never take a grape from a grocery store have no difficulty at all downloading the entire discography of They Might Be Giants on a file sharing network.

So let's take an unofficial poll, to which you can respond anonymously.

What is your definition of stealing, and have you ever stolen digital media?

Talk to me, you thieving little vixens.

50 comments

An Ebook Future?

Even if we take our waning economy out of the picture, publishing has been in trouble for a long time.

As a business model, publishing is flawed. I've heard that only one out of five books makes a profit, and that a fifty percent sell through is considered acceptable.

Think about if General Motors or Coca-Cola used those figures to determine success. For every five bottles of Coke sold, only one makes a profit? For every two cars built, one is scrapped?

The problem goes back to the archaic practice of returns. At any point, a bookseller can return a book back to the publisher for a full refund. In the case of a paperback, the whole book doesn't even have to be returned—the cover is stripped off the book and mailed back, giving the bookseller credit towards their next purchase.

What's the incentive to move a particular title? None. It either sells on its own, or they ship it back and replace it with something else.

While a sweet deal for the bookseller, this causes all sorts of problems for the publisher and author. Publishers spend a great deal of money promoting blockbusters, and apply heavy discounts to entice chains to carry multiple copies. Smaller bookstores don't get these same discounts, and lose sales as a result. Midlist authors who don't get the star treatment find their books have a shelf life of only a few weeks before being returned, which means they don't have the distribution or exposure to grow an audience that might someday make them bestsellers.

This high cost of promotion, the megabucks paid to to bestsellers, and the cost of returns is why a hardcover costs $25.95 when you can buy the third season of LOST for only $15.

Again, keeping the economy out of it, publishing now has to deal with new technology. Most of publishing still uses offset presses, which were invented hundreds of years ago, so the industry can't be considered an early adopter.

Technology fosters format change. VHS became DVD. Vinyl became CD which became mp3.

With digital ebooks and audiobooks, distribution is no longer an issue. Shipping to stores, stocking copies, printing, advanced orders—they're all soon to be things of the past. With ebook readers like Kindle 2, suddenly there is a cheap, fast, effective way to distribute books.

It isn't perfect yet. But it will be.

The ebook reader of the future will have the following features:

- Waterproof and scratchproof
- Under $100
- Long battery life
- Big storage capacity
- Backlit, with adjustable size font

- Internet accessible
- Large, no glare screen
- Interactivity

DVDs didn't replace VHS because they had better resolution. That's why BluRay is having trouble replacing DVD. It isn't about picture quality.

It's about extras. Alternate endings. Commentary. Deleted footage. Trailers.

Videophiles love extras, so they went to DVD. BluRay offer the same extras as DVD, but it is more expensive, so it isn't catching on in a big way.

Consumers switched to CDs only because CDs had extra songs, and could be copied. Prior to copy capability, CDs were just another overpriced format for technogeeks.

Mp3s replaced CDs because of ease of use and a free distribution method. Downloading the songs you want and putting them on your iPod is easier than lugging around 50 CDs. IPods can now store cover art, lyrics, liner notes, as well as play videogames, store addresses, and even play movies.

For ebooks to catch on, publishers and writers will have to offer more than just text.

Which brings us to the the next problem. File sharing.

Digital media wants to be free. People don't consider copying a bunch of ones and zeros to be stealing. Why are folks going to pay $15 for a Kindle download when they can get the hardcover on sale for $15?

Ebooks will replace print books. But along with a reader that has the features I've mentioned, ebooks have to also:

- Be 99 cents or less
- Offer extra content, such as author interviews, cut scenes, bonus short stories
- Be easily downloadable from a variety of sources
- Offer the audio version as well, (and not a monotone robot reading the text)
- Be DRM free, without copy restriction

When that happens, ebooks will take over. It may not happen right away, but it will happen…

Illegal Downloading and Ebooks

As of this writing, you can Google "JA Konrath"+torrent and get over two thousand hits. Add in Usenet, eMule, Limewire, and other file sharing clients, and there are a whole lot of people downloading my ebooks and audiobooks without permission. Last year it was less than a thousand. The year before, just a few hundred.

While I love used books, many authors hate them. Some authors aren't keen on libraries, either. After all, authors only make money for each new book sold. If the books are traded, resold, or lent out, they feel they're losing money.

These authors are in for quite a shock in the upcoming years.

Once ebook readers come down in price and become as prevalent as iPods, the 4 billion dollar a year used book industry will be the least of their worries. One $10 ebook download will be up on the torrent sites the day it is released, if not leaked sooner, and will be shared by thousands.

This industry will go digital. DRM doesn't work. People don't consider file-sharing to be stealing. Sales will drop, guaranteed.

Technically, it's impossible to count illegal downloads as lost sales, because chances are most people stealing a copy wouldn't pay for a copy. If they had no way to get it for free, they'd do without it.

At least, that's how I feel about the majority of stuff I steal on the net.

But can we really blame the consumers? Or can the publishers take some of the blame? In this economy, can anyone even afford to pay $25 for a hardcover that will entertain them for 9 hours, when that same money can be used to buy dinner and rent 2 dvds?

Books are overpriced. So is music. And we all know what happened there.

The music industry blew it. Here they had a free distribution system set up by fans. No more production costs. No more shipping charges. No more wholesalers and retailers taking part of the profit. But instead of figuring out how to work within this system, they tried to shut it down and created a hydra.

If Google (with their Kindle), and Sony (with their Ereader), were smart, they'd begin signing writers exclusively to their platforms, split the royalties 50/50 with the writers, and charge a dollar or two for ebook downloads. An easy-to-access online store, well organized and cheap, could cut down on pirating.

Of course, if they were really smart, they'd give the books away for free and charge advertisers for spots. Then piracy wouldn't be a factor.

But print, as we know it, is doomed. The publishing business model is broken, books are too expensive and increasingly harder to find on store shelves, and the ebook revolution is just around the corner.

We can bemoan the change, but we can't fight it, even with contract renegotiations. The used book industry is peanuts compared to the ability of one ebook buyer to distribute thousands of copies for free.

And telling folks that stealing is bad isn't going to change a thing, any more than it did for music. Copy protection won't change a thing either.

Here's a fun thought experiment about new technologies: Pretend print books never existed. What advantage would they have over ebooks?

Let's say we grew up with ebook devices, like my son is growing up with his iPod. Would print even exist?

Ebook devices are still too expensive. But when they come down to under a hundred bucks, and are scratch proof and waterproof, then print no longer has any advantages. Ebooks can be cheaper or free, faster to acquire, you can adjust the font size and type, read without a light, carry 5000 books at once, the books can be interactive and searchable with extra content like DVDs, and the list goes on.

If such a device existed, would there be a single reason to invent print books? What's the advantage of printing, shipping, and killing 40 million trees a year? (and that's just for the book industry, not newspapers or magazines.)

But we grew up with print books, so we're reluctant to give them up. That is, until we actually try a Kindle 2 and go nuts over that the same way we went nuts over our first iPod.

Some steps are being made in this direction. Amazon, and Sony (which just made a deal with Google for their library of public domain books) are now publishers.

Agents, and all of the big publishers, are anxious to hop into bed with them, rather than consider alternatives. No publisher that I'm aware of has been able to generate much in the way of website traffic and online sales.

But if Random House suddenly made its entire backlist available online as pdfs for 99 cents a download, that could change the playing field.

They won't, of course. It isn't in their best interest to go digital. They consider erights to be subsidiary, not primary. While everyone is very interested in ebooks, no one believes it will actually replace print, so no one is taking steps to prepare for that.

Smart companies look ahead and change accordingly, even if it means abandoning what originally made them companies. But often, people spend so much energy clinging to the now, they don't have any hands left to reach for what's coming.

But all this is going to do is make it easier for the thieves. Unless Amazon, Sony, and all of the publishers make the ebooks cheap, they'll be stolen.

Actually, they'll be stolen anyway, but the cheaper the book, the more copies that will sell. Why should I search for and download a torrent when I can get the book with a click of a button for 99 cents?

Then again, I have filled my iPod, and it wasn't using iTunes. Chances are, even if books are cheap, they'll still be stolen. But without wholesalers, retailers, or distributors to take a cut, it makes no sense why an

author shouldn't make half of the one dollar download, or more. In fact, do we even need publishers any more? Why not just hire a freelancer to copyedit, then the entire dollar goes to the author?

Publishers are falling into the same trap that a lot of companies fall into when new technology comes along, which is: How can I make sure I'm still relevant?

So their business models obviously include themselves.

But what do publishers really do for writers? They print, distribute, and promote. With all the costs along the way, they profit about $3 on a $24 hardcover, same as the author.

Now there are much lower costs. Printing and distributing, which involves shipping and giving percentages to middle-men, are all but gone now.

So what exactly do we need publishers for in an ebook world? What service are they providing?

None at all.

Amazon realizes this. Why should they share money with a publisher for an ebook? Why not publish the ebook themselves?

But Amazon is still taking a healthy cut, because they feel they're using their distribution system.

Sorry, Amazon, but $10 for an ebook is too much. People are going to steal it. And their distribution, while the only real game in town (except for Sony), still isn't that great. Amazon doesn't sell that many books, and they don't sell that many ebooks.

But has anyone actually compared cheap ebooks to free ebooks to see which people prefer?

I have.

As an experiment, I'm offering an ebook download on my website for 99 cents.

In four weeks, 183 people have downloaded it. Not bad for a midlist author. But I have several hundred thousand books in print, so 183 is actually pretty minuscule.

Also, as an experiment, I've been offering free ebook downloads on my website.

As of today, my free ebooks (not excerpts, these are full books) have been downloaded 16,534 times.

If I'd sold ad space in those ebooks, I could have made some money —a lot more than the 183 ebooks I sold.

So, even at 99 cents per book, even if the author made the entire 99 cents, I'm pretty sure free is the way to go.

Project Gutenberg has over 120,000 ebook downloads per day, for free.

If Amazon thinks they can compete with free, they're crazy.

Ebook Blowout: Amazon Kindle Free Downloads

Anyone who follows my blog knows my feelings about ebooks. Namely, they're the future.

Grand Central, the publisher for Afraid, has taken this concept to heart, and my horror novel is available as downloads for the Amazon Kindle and the Sony Reader, for just $1.99.

Here are my current Amazon Kindle rankings:

Amazon.com Sales Rank: #11 in Kindle Store

#1 in Kindle Store > Kindle Books > Fiction > Horror
#3 in Kindle Store > Kindle Books > Mystery & Thrillers > Thrillers > Suspense
#5 in Kindle Store > Kindle Books > Fiction > Genre Fiction

So, I'm pretty happy my publisher made this decision. There are a few hundred thousand books available on Kindle, so to be at #11 means that people are buying it.

But why are they buying it?

Is it because they've heard about it? Doubtful. I haven't had any advertising, done any touring, had a major marketing push.

So what are the ten books currently outselling me?

Four are Stephanie Meyer books —no big surprise there. Two are bibles. And while the bible is a popular book, the reason they're doing so well is they are free.

Also free is Lee Child's book, Persuader, and I'm tickled he's outselling both bibles. Persuader is one of his older titles, and giving it away for free is a smart way to hook new readers on his series.

The other three are the monster bestsellers The Shack, the Steve Harvey book, and the Mark R. Levin book. Like the Stephanie Meyer books, these are full price, between six dollars and ten dollars.

Rounding out the top 25, we find eight more free books, and six more full-priced bestsellers.

It's pretty easy to see why Afraid is on the Kindle bestseller list.

While it is not a print bestseller, and it is not free, the $1.99 price makes it an impulse purchase, like candy in the check-out line at the grocery store. If you just bought a $350 device to read books, naturally you want to fill the device up. But filling it up with $10 books will cost a fortune —very much like filling up an iPod using iTunes.

So Kindle owners are looking for free books, and cheap books. They're looking hard enough for them to spend $1.99 on a debut novel by an unknown author.

This works out perfect for Afraid by Jack Kilborn. I'm getting new readers, and if they like me, perhaps they'll seek out my other books, either in ebook form or in print.

Hyperion, the publisher of my Jack Daniels books, also gets it. They released the first in my series, Whiskey Sour, on Kindle for $3.96. How is that doing?

Amazon.com Sales Rank: #757 in Kindle Store

#3 in Kindle Store > Kindle Books > Mystery & Thrillers > Police Procedurals
#14 in Kindle Store > Kindle Books > Mystery & Thrillers > Mystery > Women Sleuths
#36 in Kindle Store > Kindle Books > Mystery & Thrillers > Thrillers > Suspense

Not bad for a book that's been out for five years.

How are my other four regularly-priced Jack Daniels Kindle versions doing?

None of them are on the Kindle bestseller lists.

The Kindle bestseller lists, and the Amazon Shorts bestseller lists, are dominated by free books.

Both Amazon, and publishers, should be paying close attention to this. If they truly want to sell ebooks, cheap or free can get more downloads than full priced mega-bestsellers. For heaven's sake, in what crazy world can Afraid by Jack Kilborn outsell Stephen King, Dean Koontz, James Patterson, Nora Roberts, JK Rowling, Harlan Coben, Clive Cussler, and all the other giants?

Only in the world of lower prices.

Now imagine if all ebooks were cheap or free. Imagine how quickly they'd take over the print industry.

You won't have to imagine it for long. Because it's coming.

And for all of you Kindle and Sony Reader owners who surfed onto my blog on the basis of my header, visit www.JAKonrath.com, where I have six free ebooks, compatible with both devices, along with one for 99 cents.

Also something to consider: My free ebooks have been downloaded 17,568 times. My 99 cent book has been download 204 times.

If ebooks take over, like I think they will, freebies, pirated copies, and illegal downloads will decimate the print industry just like file sharing mp3s have decimated the CD industry.

You heard it here first.

More Afraid reviews:

http://unmainstreammomreads.blogspot.com/2009/03/101-afraid-by-jack-kilborn.html

http://hellnotes.com/afraid-book-review/

http://www.flamesrising.com/afraid-fiction-review/

http://bookreviewsbybobbie.wordpress.com/2009/03/31/book-review-of-afraid-arc/

http://www.1800blogger.com/2009/04/01/book-review-afraid-by-jack-kilborn/

Also, I'm guest posting at Naked Authors, to see if I get a better response than I did at The Outfit:

http://www.nakedauthors.com/2009/04/guest-blogger-ja-konrath.html

25 comments

E-Volution

So it's 2014, and I'm in a reading mood.

I take out my ereader. At the push of a button, I bring up several different ebook stores, and begin to browse for something to read. Several stores are having sales. One of them gives all the books away for free —the only catch is each contains ads, much like a magazine.

I peruse the free site, download the latest thriller from my favorite author, and jump into the pool, floating on a raft while I read. There's no worry; the reader is waterproof.

There's construction going on in my neighborhood, so I put in my wireless ear buds and press the SFX button. As my eyes pass over the words, I'm treated to some background music, much like a movie soundtrack. There are also ambient sounds —crashing waves during a beach scene, crickets at night, the blowing wind when the main character goes to the desert for a showdown.

An ad comes up. It's a coupon for my local pizza joint. Pizza actually sounds pretty good. I touch the screen and order a pizza, using the coupon, paying for it immediately.

Then I hit the AUDIO button and close my eyes, letting the book read to me for a while as I float around. The narrator is good —using dialects and different voices for different characters. I pause the book, and access a search engine to see what other books he's narrated. I find two that sound interesting and download them on the spot.

I go back to the book, then get an announcement that my pizza has arrived. I climb out of the pool, thank the delivery guy (I already tipped him electronically) and then go into the family room with a slice.

I sync my ereader to my TV and adjust the words to scroll down the screen as I'm eating. During a particularly exciting helicopter chase, I see an author footnote. I click on it, and the author appears in a video clip, explaining the research he did for the scene, and showing the actual helicopter in flight. Normally I wait until after I finish the ebook before I delve into the extras like commentary, footnotes, vid clips, previous drafts, etc.

I get to another ad, which I skip, and then my wife comes home and says that her favorite author is appearing at a nearby bookstore. She grabs her ereader and we head out.

We get there early. The store contains over 300,000 paper books, but they're all shelf copies, not for sale. I hang out in the thriller section, and thumb through a few paper books. I find one I want, and scan the bar code on the back with my ereader, instantly buying it.

The author arrives. We sit and watch while he does a little talk. He has some printed books for sale, and if they run out, the bookstore says it will print more while we wait.

After the presentation, he signs some ereader covers. My wife has a clear plastic cover for her ereader, and the author has a cardboard covers he signs, which slips into the plastic.* Then he gives away some exclusive content to anyone who buys the book —a deleted chapter not available online. My wife buys an ebook. She

promises to lend it to me when she's done, transferring it from her reader to mine —which is how e-lending at the library works.

On the way home, I sync my ereader to the car stereo, and let it read the next chapter. Another ad comes on, for a new book by this author. I bookmark the ad. I'll either buy the book, or download the ad version, later tonight.

I go back to the pool, alternating between reading and being read to. When the book is finished, I delve into the bonus features. The author included a tie-in short story, which I love. I contact the author's website and tell him so, then spend a few minutes posting my book review on his forum. This leads to me text chatting with another one of his fans, who suggests a new author I'd never heard of.

Two clicks later, I buy this new author's latest, for $1.99.

My wife asks if I want to watch a movie. I decline. I've got more than enough here to keep me entertained.

My ereader text box opens up. It's the author, thanking me for posting a kind review. He asks me if I'd like to be a beta reader for his new thriller, which won't be released for another two months.

Hell yeah, I do. He sends it to me instantly.

Boy, do I love this thing. It's easily the best $99 I've ever spent.

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* The plastic slip cover is Boyd Morrison's idea, which is smarter than my original idea: publishers making ereader covers that look like book covers.

55 comments

Stanza and the Future of Ebooks

As of this writing, Stanza has been downloaded over two million times.

What's Stanza?

Stanza is an electronic reading application for the iPhone and iPod Touch. It's free. And unlike the Kindle app, which is also available for iPhones, Stanza isn't dedicated to a single format.

Let's talk about formats for a moment, because they're one of the reasons ebooks haven't gone mainstream yet.

The history of media technology is all about formats. A format is the means in which a piece of media (books, movies, music) can be distributed, and, possibly, purchased.

The first form of media was writing. For a long time, the first format for this media was stone.

If you wanted to share your writing, you wrote it on a cave wall, or chiseled it into an obelisk or pyramid. This format had the advantage of being long-lasting, but lacked in portability, and ownership was unheard of. If you wanted to read something, you went to the writing.

Then came paper, and scrolls. Scrolls made it easier to write, and they were portable. But scrolls were labor-intensive, because each scroll had to be hand-written. This precluded ownership, except in the case of libraries, scholars, rulers, and the very rich.

Scrolls were the preferred format for writing for millennia. Then a guy named Gutenberg came along and invented the printing press, and the preferred format became printed books. These were cheap, reproducible, and have been the de facto format for sharing writing media.

Until now.

Now, writing, and publishing, has gone digital. Offset printing, with its costs, labor-intensive set-up, and distribution and shipping limitations (which requires time and travel) is no longer the best format.

The advent of the computer, and the Internet, has made writing easier than ever, and distribution free and unlimited. One monk could labor for years on one scroll, which might be seen by only a few dozen people. With books, a writer could reach millions, but was still limited by gatekeepers (publishers and agents) and distribution. It involved money, and a lot of people. Now a writer can save their words for eternity using an electronic format, for free, and reach unlimited numbers of readers.

But there's a problem. Which format should writers use?

Let's look back to Edison and the invention of the phonograph. Edison's invention used a tube. A competitor used a disk. For whatever reason, consumers bought more disks than tubes, and the record became the preferred format for music.

Other formats showed up. Reel to reel tape. Eight track tape. Cassettes. Digital tape. And CDs.

Of these formats, DT (digital tape) made the most sense. It allowed the consumer to record music digitally, which allowed for much faster and better recordings than analog. The first CDs didn't allow recording.

But eventually, CD burners came into vogue, and CDs became the preferred format for music. Up until mp3s came along.

Let's look back on the history of photography. Actually, let's skip to the part where no one buys film anymore, and everyone has a digital camera.

When movies first became popular, over a hundred years ago, ownership was unheard of. Films were seen, and only the rich could own them. Less-expensive 8mm films weren't a big hit with consumers. Video tape, when it first arrived, caused big controversy and a few lawsuits between the movie and TV producers and videotape manufacturers.

For those who remember, the very first movie ever released to the general public was Star Trek II, on VHS and Beta, for the own-it price of $59.99. This was revolutionary. If you had a $600 VCR or Betamax, you could actually own a movie.

VHS wound up winning the videotape war, even though Beta tapes were smaller and had a superior picture quality. But VHS was eventually usurped by DVD.

You can now buy new DVD players for $30, and new DVDs for $5.

BluRay has tried to replace DVDs as the preferred format (after winning the war against HD-DVD), but it hasn't happened yet. Downloading may be the culprit. Why go out and spend $40 on a BluRay disc when you can download a high def movie on cable, satellite, or on your computer? You can also download digital movies to your iPhone, iPod, PSP, PS3, XBOX 360, and many other gadgets.

Why have a physical copy, that requires manufacturing, travel, shipping, and distribution, and shelf space, when you can fit 300 movies on your hard drive and get them by pressing a button?

But even with downloading movies, there are different formats to deal with. Avi, m4v, mp4, rm, iso, img, and a dozen more.

Which brings us back to formats.

Formats can only be read using certain media or programs. Just like you couldn't play your Edison tube on your RCA 78 player, or your Beta tape on a VHS machine, you can't play your avi movie on your home DVD player (for those who aren't into the downloading scene, avi is about as universal a format as you can get for movies, and there are well over a million avi movies and shows available for free if you know where to look.)

Looking back on history, the best format didn't always win the media wars. VHS beat Beta (and laserdisks). CD beat DT. BluRay beat HD-DVD.

I have a theory about why.

When a company invents a media format, they want control over it. They license the format to others who want to release media on that technology.

This usually backfires, because someone comes along with a competing format that doesn't require a license (or has a cheaper license). No license means its easier for others to release media. The more media a format has available, the more likely it is to succeed.

In some cases, licenses don't matter. The ability for consumers to copy the media in a specific format (like the case of avi —no one has ever released consumer avi files for purchase) will make it the format of choice.

Which brings us back to writing, and to ebooks.

For all intents and purposes, ebooks are superior to print. If you grew up reading ebooks, would there be any advantage at all to inventing offset printing? No.

Ebooks, whether or not anyone wants to believe it, are the future. Because they're cheaper, easier, faster, more versatile, and can be copied.

So why haven't they taken off in a big way yet?

Formats.

There are well over two dozen different ebook formats.

For consumers, this is a nightmare. It's not a question of choosing between VHS or Beta, or HD-DVD and BluRay. It's a question of choosing among a dozen different ebook readers, with more coming out every month. And each of these readers has a licensed format specific and exclusive to their device or program.

Remember when you dumped your VHS and had to buy all of your movies again on DVD? Think about buying the same book ten times, as ereaders come and go and none of their formats are compatible.

Right now, Kindle is the leader in ereader sales. Sony is very much in the game. Barnes & Noble is releasing an ereader too.

Let's set aside the functions, bells and whistles of these machines for a moment. Let's also set aside price. These gadgets will continue to become better, and cheaper, like all technology does.

What it will come down to, like it always does, is who has the biggest library of media available. That will be the format that wins.

Which means these companies have a choice. They can either try to license as many books as possible on their devices in order to get the largest library, or they can create readers that read many different formats, and let consumers decide (as in the case of avi and mp3) which format they prefer.

Now along comes Stanza. It isn't a $400 unitasking ereader that is bound to a single format. It's a free application that reads all of the major formats.

I've been playing around with Stanza for the past week, and I'm impressed. It has the biggest library of any ebook reader, both legally (buying ebooks in various formats) and illegally (downloading ebooks on file sharing sites.)

Don't think people are stealing ebooks? In a one hour stretch yesterday, I downloaded 700 books, all by popular and bestselling authors (including all of my own titles) for free. There are hundreds of thousands of free ebooks available on the Internet, many of them illegal.

Stanza can read all of these books, even though they're in different formats. This is revolutionary. It's also a big step closer to having a universal ereader.

"Universal" is the key here. In the past, Joe Consumer waited for the one format that was available everywhere —the one with staying power —before he committed to buying some new camera or video player or personal stereo.

But now, he doesn't have to wait. He can let the companies duke it out, get a Stanza for free, and read whatever he wants to, in whatever format he wants to. And with a bit of know-how, he'll never have to pay for a book again.

Stanza isn't without its flaws. Some formats don't read as smoothly as others. And getting books from your computer onto Stanza isn't as quick, easy, or elegant as it is with the Amazon Kindle.

But give it time.

Maybe it will be Stanza. Maybe it will be another ereader. But soon, you'll be able to get an app that allows you to instantly download any book you want, for free, on your gadget du jour.

Now, if the big boys want to compete with this, here are my suggestions.

1. Lose proprietary formats, and stop linking your devices to only one distribution network. A universal ebook reader will be able to read many formats, and get them easily from many sources.

2. You don't fight piracy with copy protection and licensing. You fight it with cost and convenience. That means NY print publishers need to wake the hell up and stop selling ebooks for full price. For those who don't know, Kindle and Sony lose money on ebook versions of hardcovers. Publishers insist on selling ebooks to them for 40% of the hardcover price. So when Kindle or Sony sell an ebook for $9.99 (which is still waaaaay too high) they are actually LOSING five bucks per book. How do any of the parties involved in this ridiculous model think it can be sustainable?

3. Become your own publisher. Then you control the content, and the price, and you don't have to share profits (or lose profits.) Kindle has allowed for authors to publish on their device (and Sony is doing the same) and since April I've made over eight thousand dollars selling my books there. But allowing authors to publish, and actively soliciting name authors, are two different things. They need to start soliciting.

4. Once you have the universal technology nailed down, share it. It's smart for Amazon to have a Kindle for iPhone. But if it really wants to be the universal reader, it should have Kindle apps freely available for all smart phones, computers, video game systems, cable and satellite TV, and pretty much everything

consumers use or can use to read on. Then it should allow that reader to access books not only on Amazon, but on all places ebooks are available.

So how will they make money, if they give away the app for free, and link to sources that have free ebooks?

Stay tuned...

Coming This Monday: I'll share the answer. I'm also going to back up my words with actions, and begin a new, revolutionary ebook experiment that you can participate in. It's going to turn some heads, that's for sure.

16 comments

Are You There, Amazon? It's Me, JA

An open letter to Jeff Bezos and Amazon.

I want to tell you why I haven't bought a Kindle yet.

I'm still considering it, because I made about $3000 in June selling my unpublished novels and published short stories on the Kindle. Three grand is a nice chunk of change, and it will be interesting to see if those numbers stay strong through oncoming months.

But even with this success, I can't bring myself to buy a Kindle.

Here are the five main things preventing my purchase:

1. Cost. A Kindle is simply too much money, especially compared to other electronic gadgets that do more. While I'm sure manufacturing costs are high, all costs reduce with time, and if I were Amazon I'd spend a lot of time and money figuring out how to get the price down so more people buy Kindles.

2. Most of the books on Amazon are too much as well. This is the publisher's fault, because they set the price. So perhaps Amazon should stop dealing with publishers and start dealing directly with authors. Mr. Bezos, if you want an exclusive JA Konrath title, contact me.

2. DRM. When I buy a book, I want to own a book and do whatever I want with it, and copy-protection makes that impossible. Again, this is publishers doing this, not Amazon, but it is preventing me from buying Amazon's Kindle.

3. Format. There are too many ebooks available on the net for cheap or free that aren't compatible with Kindle formats. The Kindle DX reads pdf, which is terrific, but it costs a hundred bucks more than the Kindle 2. Give me this feature for less, and I'm sold.

4. Unitasking. A mini-laptop costs the same, is only a bit larger, and can do a billion things. As of right now, the Kindle is limited in what it can do. It does what it does very well, but people like their gadgets to have cross-purposes.

Unfortunately, Amazon hasn't released a Kindle app for PCs, and I have no idea why. The laptop minis are perfect for reading because they are so portable.

But Kindle has released an app for the iPhone and iPod Touch. My son recently got an iPod Touch, and I played with it for a few days.

Wow.

I love this gadget. Reading on it is ridiculously easy, not only using the Kindle app, but using other readers like Stanza (also owned by Amazon.) Many books also have their own app, including my novella SERIAL, which doesn't require a reader —you simply download the free ebook and the reader is included.

I had no problems curling up with the iPod for an extended reading session, and enjoyed the experience. While I don't believe this is going to be the de facto way of reading ebooks in the future, for the time being it's a nice placeholder.

So what will the breakout ebook reader be like? Mr. Bezos, take note.

1. Under $150, and available at retail outlets like Wal-mart and Best Buy.

2. Wireless Internet capabilities for downloading books.

3. Able to read many different ebook formats, with no DRM.

4. Adjustable font size, type, and contrast.

5. A built in light.

6. Color no-glare e-ink.

7. Upgradable memory and operating system.

8. Long battery life, scratch proof, and water proof (or at least with skins available to make it waterproof.)

9. E-Book 2.0 capabilities.

What is E-book 2.0? And why aren't more people thinking about it?

Here are my Criswell predictions for E-book 2.0:

- The books will be interactive, the words clickable on a touch screen. You click on the word "lugubrious" and it gives you a dictionary definition, or the word "Taj Mahal" and it shows you a jpg picture.
- Ebooks will have extra content, such as author annotation, first drafts, deleted chapters, extra short stories, interviews, essays.
- The ebook version and audio version will be packaged together.
- There will be options for ambient sounds while reading, as well as music.
- Ebooks will be upgradable, meaning the author can continue to add DLC (downloadable content, which is hugely popular in videogames) to books. A reader can buy the first part of a chapbook, then automatically get each new chapter as the author finishes it.
- Ebooks will link to book-specific forums, where readers can review the book and share thoughts and interact with other readers.
- The touch screen will be signable, so authors can autograph their books (much like signing the electronic screen on a credit card machine.)

Will these things come to pass? Honestly, I think they will. Playing with the iPod Touch, seeing the unlimited potential of a handheld electronic device, there is no reason why books shouldn't go the same route movies have gone, getting deluxe DVD editions with extra Rom content. It will be interesting to see what the future holds.

In the meantime, I'm going to be reading on my son's iPod, waiting for the Amazon Kindle to catch up...

42 comments

That About Covers It

I've recently uploaded new ebook covers for my Kindle books.

Everyone has opinions about cover art, but few people are able to articulate why they like something, or why they think it works (or doesn't work.)

I approached the new covers with some specific goals in mind. Whether I reached them or not is open to debate, but here was my thought process.

1. Branding. Each of the new covers has a JK banner on the top, with a blurb in it. Even though the images and styles on the covers vary greatly, I wanted a unifying factor. The simple brand JK does this.

2. Genre. I want the reader to be able to tell in two seconds what sort of book this is based on the cover. With Truck Stop, it's a serial killer/cop thriller. Shot of Tequila is a men's action novel, so I wanted a throwback to the pulps with a Robert McGinnis-type of image. Origin is a monster-on-the-loose book, and The List is a technothriller. I believe each of these covers convey their genre.

3. Professional. My early covers looked self-published, like someone with no talent played around with Photoshop —which was exactly what I did. I wanted the new covers to look like books that big publisher release. Or, in the case of Tequila, released 40 years ago.

4. Reduceable. Amazon, and many other e-tailers, shrink the covers to thumbnail size when browsing. I wanted these to still be identifiable and readable when compressed.

5. Eye-catching. After the initial, two-second impression, I wanted enough detail to get people to look closer. The background of Origin is a bible page. The List has a gene sequence, and a family tree of related events. Tequila has some blurbs, an aged appearance, and a fake cover price. With Truck Stop, besides the blood and the bloody tire marks, the heel on the shoe is broken. Hopefully this makes the reader wonder who owns the shoe, and why it is broken, which is answered in the story.

What are some other things you look for in covers? What makes a cover good or bad? And do we really judge books by their covers?

I'd love to hear your thoughts...

30 comments

Amazon Kindle Numbers

Elsewhere on the Internets, people have been referring to my previous posts about the Amazon Kindle (here and here) and one of the things they were interested in is numbers.

So here they are. Thoughts, explanations, and predictions to follow.

AFRAID by Jack Kilborn, a horror novel, was released on the Kindle on April 1. During the first month of its release, it was available for $1.99 on Kindle. During that month, it sold over 10,400 copies.

SERIAL by Jack Kilborn and Blake Crouch was released for free on the Kindle May 20th. It's a horror novella. As of June 10, it has been downloaded on Kindle more than 34,000 times. SERIAL also appears on www.blakecrouch.com, and has had 12,000 downloads, along with 7000 downloads from the Sony Reader website.

Both AFRAID and SERIAL were released by my publisher, Grand Central. They promoted both titles on Amazon using sidebars on Amazon.com, and on the Amazon Kindle blog.

On April 8th, I began to upload my own books to Kindle. As of today, June 11, at 11:40am, here is how many copies I've sold, and how much they've earned.

THE LIST, a technothriller/police procedural novel, is my biggest seller to date, with 1612 copies sold. Since April this has earned $1081.75. I originally priced it at $1.49, and then raised it to $1.89 this month to see if the sales would slow down. The sales sped up instead.

ORIGIN, a technothriller/horror occult adventure novel, is in second place, with 1096 copies sold and $690.18. As with The List and my other Kindle novels, I upped the price to $1.89.

SUCKERS is a thriller/comedy/horror novella I wrote with Jeff Strand. It also includes some Konrath and Strand short stories. 449 copies, $306.60.

DISTURB is a medical thriller. 371 copies, $234.21.

SHOT OF TEQUILA is a crime novel featuring Jack Daniels. 342 copies, $164.02.

55 PROOF is a collection of 55 short stories. 217 copies, $138.99.

PLANTER'S PUNCH is a Jack Daniels novella I co-wrote with Tom Schreck. 154 copies, $107.10.

DIRTY JOKES & VULGAR POEMS is a collection of over 1000 of my Twitters, one-liners, and funny poems. 37 copies sold, $18.57.

So far on Kindle I've earned $2781.35 in 64 days.

PRICING: I've kept my collaborations priced at $1.59, and upped my other books to $1.89. Also, I reduced the price of my poetry collection to 80 cents.

What I've learned about pricing: Not much. I went on some Kindle forums and asked what the magic price point is, and got answers ranging between free and five bucks.

I've kept my books under two bucks for several reasons. First, because my intent is to use these books to hook readers and get them to buy my other, in-print titles. I give these same books away on my website for free, so charging Kindle users more than a few bucks doesn't seem fair.

That said, raising the price from $1.59 to $1.89 didn't cause any drop in sales or Amazon ranking. In fact, my Kindle numbers have been steadily going up.

I don't know what the perfect combination of price/profit is... yet. Authors make 35% of their suggested retail price (Amazon then discounts this.) So I can raise the price, sell fewer books, but still make a greater profit.

For me, however, this isn't all about profit. It's about units sold. Which also gets confusing.

UNITS SOLD: Pricing doesn't seem to be much of a factor in units sold, as my lowest price book is also my worst seller, and there doesn't seem to be any correlation between price and sales.

What I've learned about units sold: Nothing. I have no clue why The List, which is a fun technothriller about cloning, is outselling Origin, which is about a secret government compound studying Satan. In fact, on my website, Origin has been downloaded 2675 times, and The List only 2223.

Even stranger is SHOT OF TEQUILA, which is a Jack Daniels tie-in novel. I'm known for my JD books, and there is a pre-existing audience for them. Yet the Kindle version is very much underperforming compared to my other three novels, even though I have sold more than 300 copies of it on my website for 99 cents.

PRODUCT DESCRIPTION: I've tweaked all of my product descriptions several times, playing with the wording and the formatting. I didn't see any noticeable uptick or downtick with any changes I've made.

What I've learned about product description: I believe the product description should sing, but the genre of the book may be more important than the description. I think my best and most provocative description is for the poem book, which is selling poorly.

Category listings and keywords seem to be just as important, if not more important, than the description, because this is how people browse for titles.

COVER ART: People do judge books by their covers, and the covers I've uploaded to Kindle aren't good.

What I've learned about cover art: Not much. I redid the cover art on the poetry book, and it apparently did nothing. Of course, the new art may be just as ugly as the old art.

I'm having a professional cover done for TEQUILA to see if that improves sales. I'll keep everyone posted.

NAME RECOGNITION: Having seven books in print does make it easier for people looking for my books to find them. But there are other authors doing just as well or better than I am on Kindle, and they've never been traditionally published.

What I've learned about name recognition: It may not be as important as other criteria.

QUALITY OF WRITING: Do good books sell better than bad books? Is it even possible to judge quality objectively?

What I've learned about quality of writing: Amazon reviews and Kindle previews (which allow people do download a sample before buying) should have a long range impact on sales. I would think poor reviews will sink a book, or poor writing will result in it not being downloaded, or it being returned (Kindle books can be refunded.)

But I'm not sure if this is a deciding sales factor yet, because the Kindle is still so new, and because people are buying cheap Kindle books but aren't reading them right away.

I also have to look at SERIAL, which has gotten more than twenty 1 star reviews, and is still being downloaded 1000 times per day.

Perception of quality ultimately dictates if a person will buy your next book, but may not be a factor in them trying your first book. For two bucks, why not try it? And if it sits on the Kindle without being read for a year, it isn't helping or hurting your future sales.

But good reviews do help sales, just like a good cover and a good product description does. I just haven't figured out how much yet...

CONCLUSIONS

It's hard to draw any conclusions, because there just isn't enough data. But there are some things I'm noticing.

1. Publisher releases vastly outsell author releases. This seems obvious, but a publisher can buddy-up with Amazon and get primo placement. Authors can't do this on their own.

2. Price matters. All of my ebooks (even the poetry one) are on the genre bestseller lists, outselling name-brand authors. I'm sure this is because of price.

3. Being active on the Kindle forums, in newsletters, and on Amazon, may do more for sales than your cover, your description, your reviews, or even your writing. The key is to make people aware of your books. The more awareness there is, the more you'll sell.

Once you're on a bestseller list, that becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. People browse the lists, see your book, buy your book, you stay on the lists.

4. Novels outsell short stories. It's like this in print as well, but my numbers confirm it.

5. No one buys poetry. Even outrageously funny poetry.

6. My technothrillers are doing much better than my medical thriller and my crime novel. Is this because more Kindle owners like technothrillers? It seems so.

GOALS:

1. To get professional cover art for all of my Kindle books.

2. To release a Kindle exclusive novel at a slightly higher price point ($2.99) under JA Konrath to see how it does.

3. To release a Jack Kilborn/J.A. Konrath short story on Kindle for 99 cents to see how it does.

I'm not sure what the future holds for the Amazon Kindle. I'm currently earning $90 a day, with no signs of slowing down. Now that the Kindle DX was released, I expect my numbers to rise.

With 1.5 million Kindles sold, I could sell 200 books per day, for 720 days, and still only reach 10% of all Kindle buyers. If we include all of the iPhone and iPod Touch owners who can download a Kindle ap, along with continued Kindle sales, I should be able to sell quite a few books before coming close to saturating this market.

If the $90 per day trend keeps up, that's $32,850 a year. Not a huge amount, but not chump change either.

I'll keep everyone updated. And FWIW, in the time it took me to write this blog entry, I made $16 on Kindle...

80 comments

More on the Amazon Kindle

It's the last day of May.

My little Kindle experiment has netted me $1250 for this month. As I mentioned in a previous post, this is for books that I've been giving away for free on my website for years.

I've settled on a price point of $1.59 per Kindle download (they were $1.19 for the first three weeks of May) and I'm currently making about fifty bucks a day, with no signs of slowing down.

Huge money? No. But it isn't chump change either.

The average advance for a first time novel is still $5000. If Kindle keeps growing in popularity, and the Sony Reader opens up to author submissions like it intends to, I think a motivated writer will be able to make $5000 a year on a well-written e-novel. Or more. All without ever being in print.

Isn't that fascinating?

In the previous Kindle thread, Amber Argyle-Smith mentioned that her agent warned against authors uploading to Kindle, as the book would be considered published and therefore unsalable.

On the surface, that makes sense. Ebook publishing is publishing, and once the public is able to purchase it, the first rights are gone.

If you look a little deeper, it makes even more sense why her agent said that. If authors begin uploading books to Kindle and Sony themselves, are agents and publishers still needed?

At this date, May 31 2009, agents and publishers are necessary. Any author who wants to make writing their fulltime job can only support themselves by selling print books, and the agents and publishers are a crucial part of this industry.

But how about in 2012? 2015? 2025?

If you look even deeper at what Amber's agent said, it makes less sense. Publishers aren't stupid. If an author uploads a Kindle book and sells 80,000 copies, I can't imagine publishers not being interested. Why are Kindle books any different than self-published POD books? And publishers have been known, on occasion, to buy those without qualms or nits about first rights.

Right now, the big money is in print publishing. Even with the crummy economy, with bookstores in financial trouble, and with publishers laying off people and downsizing, the big money is still there.

But there is small money to be made by authors with the Kindle. And the small money can add up.

My friend, **Robert W. Walker**, has written over forty novels. Most of them are out of print, and the rights have reverted back to him.

If he digitized and uploaded his books, and priced them at $1.59 (which earns him 70 cents a download), and sold 500 copies of each per month (I sold 500 of Origin and 780 of The List in May), he'd be making $14,000 a month, or $168,000 a year, on books that Big NY Publishing doesn't want anymore.

Even if he made half, or a third, or a fifth of that, that's decent money on books that he's not doing anything else with.

Now, all of us aren't Rob, and we don't have 40 novels on our hard drives, especially 40 novels that were good enough to have once been published in print.

But how long do you think it will be before some unknown author has a Kindle bestseller?

Publisher's Weekly lists the Kindle Bestsellers, but it omits the freebies. I suppose that makes sense —the freebies aren't actually being sold.

But the freebies are being downloaded and read. There isn't money changing hands, but branding and name-recognition —two essentials for every successful author —are happening.

The ebook horror novella I wrote with Blake Crouch, **SERIAL**, is currently the #1 Kindle Bestseller, and has been for the last nine days.

I don't know how many people have downloaded it on Kindle, but I have heard that over 7000 have downloaded it on the Sony Reader, and even more than that have downloaded it on Blake's website and various other places on the net.

I wouldn't be surprised, by the end of the year, if more than 50,000 people have downloaded SERIAL.

Is that potentially interesting to publishers? Will a savvy editor approach us with a two book deal to collaborate on some full-length horror novels?

I don't know. But I do know that even if we aren't approached by editors, I'm very interested in writing a full-length horror book with Blake and trading in on some of that branding and name-recognition we earned with SERIAL.

Let's see, 50,000 downloads, priced at $1.59 and earning 70 cents per download, divided by two, is $17,500 each. Per year, of course, since ebooks are becoming more and more popular.

And of course there is a momentum that builds. Old books sell newer books, backlists support the frontlist, each new title brings in new readers who buy an author's entire oeuvre. Profit is only limited by how many quality books an author can produce.

I know I can write four books per year. If each one makes only $5000 a year (which Origin and The List are on track to do), by year five I'll have 20 books done and be earning 100k annually just on ebooks.

If I manage to last as long as Rob Walker, I may become a millionaire yet.

And Rob, by the way, just uploaded two of his books to Kindle at $1.59 each. If you have a Kindle, check them out...

I'm also curious what will happen if I raise my prices from $1.59 to $1.89. Will sales stay steady? Will I lose some volume but gain some royalties?

June will be interesting...

46 comments

Kindle Numbers: Traditional Publishing Vs. Self Publishing

I got quite a shock last week, when I got my bi-annual royalty statement.

Hyperion publishes six titles in my Jack Daniels series. They gave me my ebook figures.

Authors are usually quite secretive about their sales and their royalties.

Me? I'm spilling the beans. Here are my ebook Kindle numbers from Jan 1 to June 31, 2009.

Whiskey Sour priced at $3.96: 550 sales, $341 earned.

Bloody Mary priced at $7.99: 180 sales, $381 earned.

Rusty Nail priced at $7.99: 153 sales, $341 earned.

Dirty Martini priced at $6.39: 202 sales, $604 earned.

Fuzzy Navel priced at $7.59: 152 sales, $341 earned.

That's 1237 ebooks sold in six months. Total money in JA's pocket: $2008.

Why do these numbers vary so much?

I get 25% of the amount received by the publisher. Depending on the deal my publisher makes with Amazon, that can be anywhere from 62 cents to $3 per ebook sold.

We can draw a simple conclusion looking at these sales: a $4 ebook sells 3 times as many copies as an $8 ebook.

Now lets compare these to my self-published Kindle sales. I'll use my four novels for comparison. This is also for a six month period.

The List priced at $1.99: 5142 sales, $3600 earned.

Origin priced at $1.99: 2619 sales, $1833 earned.

Disturb priced at $1.99: 1139 sales, $797 earned.

Shot of Tequila at $1.99: 900 sales, $630 earned.

That's 9800 ebooks sold in six months. Total money in JA's pocket: $6860.

I get 35% of the price I set on Kindle, or 70 cents per ebook download.

We can draw some simple conclusions looking at these numbers.

Ebooks priced at $4 sell an average of 1100 ebooks per year.

Ebooks priced at $8 sell an average of 342 ebooks per year.

Ebooks priced at $2 sell an average of 4900 ebooks per year.

It doesn't take a math whiz to see that the biggest profit is with low priced ebooks.

Now let's play the imagination game.

My five Hyperion ebooks (the sixth one came out in July so no royalties yet) each earn an average of $803 per year on Kindle.

My four self-pubbed Kindle novels each earn an average of $3430 per year.

If I had the rights to all six of my Hyperion books, and sold them on Kindle for $1.99, I'd be making $20,580 per year off of them, total, rather than $4818 a year off of them, total.

So, in other words, because Hyperion has my ebook rights, I'm losing $15,762 per year.

Now Hyperion also has my print rights, and my Jack Daniels books are still selling in print. But they aren't selling enough to make up the $15,762. Especially since all of them aren't regularly being stocked on bookstore shelves.

According to my math, I'd be making more money if my books were out of print, and I had my rights back.

Of course, there are a lot of different factors at play here. Certain titles are more popular than others. Print sales may fuel ebook sales. Ebooks sales may wane (though mine haven't yet.) Branding and name recognition and past customers and fans all come into play, making this damn confusing and far from conclusive.

That said, do I really want to keep signing deals with print publishers?

$3430 per ebook per year isn't really a big number. I've certainly never been paid so small an advance for a novel.

And yet, I'm 100% sure ebook sales are going to go up. I've signed deals with Smashwords to sell ebooks through Barnes and Noble, Apple to sell ebooks as iTunes apps for the Iphone and iPod Touch, and Sony to sell ebooks on their reader. Kindle was just released in 100 more countries. I predict more ebook sales in the near future.

Let's say by the end of 2010 I can make $5000 per year per ebook title by self publishing. I can easily write four books per year.

Again, $20,000 per year isn't enough to live on. But things begin to accumulate.

$20k per year for 4 new books, plus $20k per year for the books I'm already selling, is $40k per year.

But I'm selling more than novels on Kindle. I also have 6 collaborations and short story collections. This year I'm also going to put The Newbie's Guide to Publishing ebook on Kindle.

So now we're looking at 14 ebooks, each making $5k per year. That's $70,000 a year.

And as more people buy ereaders and ebooks, that number can go up. Plus, I publish on my schedule, I keep the profits, and best of all, the rights are 100% mine. So if I want to do a limited print edition, I can. If I want to sell the mass market paperback rights, I can.

Ebook rights began as gravy. I can picture a day when the print rights are the gravy, and authors make their living with ebooks.

Yes, it's still far off. And yes, print publishing is in no danger of going away anytime soon.

But I don't think I'll ever take a print contract for less than $30,000 per book, because I'm confident I could make more money on it over the course of six years than I could with a publisher over six years.

Isn't that bizarre?

For the bestselling author, this is all still very trivial. These numbers are chump change compared to the advances they get.

But for the midlist author, I'm beginning to think it's possible to make a living without print contracts.

I've struggled mightily to break into print. And I've made a nice chunk of change on my print novels.

Now I'm hoping those novels go out of print, so I can get my rights back.

I never would have guessed my mindset would change so dramatically in so short a time.

DISCLAIMER: YOUR MILEAGE MAY VARY

If you're a new author, reading this and thinking about the fame and fortune you'll make on ebooks, I urge you to try the traditional route first. Find an agent. Land a deal with a big NY house. Ebooks aren't there yet.

I'd hate to think some writer gave up on their print aspirations because of something I've said on my blog. I suggest you keep up the agent search, and hold out for that major deal. While I have no doubt others will be able to sell as many ebooks as I have, and probably many more, I still haven't made anywhere near the money I've made by being in print. Plus, everyone's situation is unique, and no writer should compare themselves to any other writer.

Most of all, don't change the future of your career based on one man's ideas. Learn as much as you can about all of your options, do research, get other opinions.

93 comments

The Great Ebook Experiment

In my previous blog post I talked about the future of ebooks. The current model of overpriced ebooks with exclusive formats isn't going to last, because history shows us it never lasts. Technology, and the media released for technology, follows a pretty predictable pattern.

I believe ebooks are going to lose proprietary formatting and copy protection, and eventually become either cheap or free. People want their media fast, easy, and inexpensive.

Fast and easy will come as a matter of course, as all tech gets better and less expensive as time goes on.

Inexpensive will come one of two ways.

In the best-case scenario, print publishers will realize their strategy of releasing ebooks for the same price as hardcovers is short-sighted and harmful, and they will lower their prices.

But I don't see them doing that. Instead, I see software and tech developers eventually coming up with a system that will allow Joe Average to quickly and easily download all ebooks for free.

Joe Average can already download all ebooks for free, but it isn't quick or easy. There is precedent for this happening, however.

I have an iPhone. The first thing I did when I bought it was jailbreak it.

Jailbreaking involves hacking the operating system of the phone, which allows it to be used for many applications that Apple doesn't condone. One of these applications is Cydia.

Cydia, and Installous, are included with the free programs used to jailbreak iPhones and iPods. These are apps that link directly to websites that let you download apps for free.

In other words, the owner of a jailbroken iPhone doesn't need to go to the iTunes App Store to buy programs and games. They can simply go to Installous and get all of the programs and games for free.

Consider the levels of piracy involved in this endeavor.

Programmers hack the source code. Software developers create the applications. Designers build websites. Then users hack applications and upload them.

This is a streamlined, coordinated effort to steal by thousands of people, used by millions of people. Anyone with a jailbroken iPhone can get any application they want, and it is fast, easy, and free.

This isn't a question of if it will happen with ebooks. It's a question of when. And when it happens, how will authors get paid?

I've said before, you combat piracy with cost and convenience. Selling ebooks (which are essentially a bunch of ones and zeros and cost nothing to copy and distribute) for $9.99 is insane. Especially when you consider that this cost results in the ebook distributors LOSING money, because the print publishers sell

them to retailers at 40% the hardcover price. This is hurting the retailers, and the consumers, who are going to go elsewhere to get their ebooks for cheap or free.

But I think there's a way for authors to make money by selling their ebooks cheaply. I think they can even make money by giving their ebooks away.

But first, let's go off on a seemingly unrelated tangent for a moment.

I love going to movies and seeing coming attractions. It gives me a taste of films that I might be interested in seeing. Sometimes a preview announces a film I didn't know about. Sometimes it gives me a glimpse of something I already knew about, and gets me excited about seeing it.

As a form of advertising, previews work. They aren't intrusive, like commercials. You pay to see a movie, and previews are a sort of bonus feature. They offer content.

People like content. They like information and entertainment. They seek it out.

Books have their own kind of preview. At the end of each of my paperbacks, there is a sample chapter of one of my upcoming books. I think this is a no-brainer. The best advertising for your writing is: your writing.

Like a coming attraction, an excerpt informs and entertains. It announces, whets the appetite, and often is a direct call to action. If I read a preview that I like, I buy the book.

For years, I've been wondering why publishers waste money on full page ads in the New York Times, featuring a picture of the book cover and a bunch of blurbs, when a much more effective ad would be a full page excerpt from the novel.

If your writing sells your writing, it makes sense to have your writing in as many places as possible, so it can be seen by as many readers as possible.

Unfortunately, print publishers haven't used this opportunity as much as they could. The end-of-book excerpt is commonplace, but it isn't the equivalent to the coming attractions at a movie theater. Instead of five previews, a book only offers one preview. And the preview is limited, because it is a preview of the same author who wrote the book.

This is understandable. Space is limited, and expensive, in print books. Plus, an author may balk at the idea of having five excerpts from other authors at the end of their novel.

Unless that author is me. :)

Personally, I'd pay a fortune to have ten pages from one of my books appear at the end of a Stephen King or James Patterson novel. It would be a tremendous opportunity.

Which brings us to this experiment.

How would you like to put a ten page excerpt from one of your books in the back of my ebooks?

Not counting SERIAL, which has had over 100,000 downloads as an ebook, my other ebooks have been downloaded roughly 30,000 times on my website and Kindle.

Here are my numbers, as of last Friday:

55 Proof - 3044 free downloads, 468 Kindle downloads
Newbie's Guide to Publishing Ebook - 5761 free downloads
Origin - 3122 free downloads, 2188 Kindle downloads
Disturb - 2724 free downloads, 869 Kindle downloads
The List - 2622 free downloads, 4088 Kindle downloads
Shot of Tequila - 425 paid downloads on my website, 720 Kindle downloads
Truck Stop - 730 Kindle downloads

Now, I'm the first to admit that this isn't enough information to base a reliable advertising scale upon. I've been tracking free books on my website for over 20 months, and have been tracking Kindle books since April 8. It's possible to average day-by-day and month-by-month downloads, but these fluctuate, and differ. For example, Truck Stop is only a month or so old. Shot of Tequila has never been given away for free. The Newbie's Guide has never been for sale. Depending on the month, book downloads go up or down. A lot of it is a crap shoot.

But I'm not out to create an accurate chart for dictating ad rates. For this experiment, I'm going to use a simple model.

I will put your book excerpt in one of my ebooks for $1 a day.

Intrigued? Here are the basic rules.

1. You provide me with an excerpt no longer than 2500 words.

2. You pay me through PayPal for a minimum of 30 days (in other words, $30.)

3. There will be a maximum of five excerpts per ebook title. First come, first serve.

4. In the product description of the ebook I will mention that your excerpt appears, stating your name and the title.

Now lets have some questions.

Q: So my excerpt will appear on both the Kindle and on your website?

A: If my book appears on both, yes. The Newbie's Guide to Publishing Ebook is only on my website. Truck Stop is only on the Kindle, though I will put it on my website soon for $1.59.

Q: Can I put an excerpt in SERIAL?

A: SERIAL, and any of the other ebooks where I have a co-author, are not going to be used for this experiment at this time.

Q: Do you accept all excerpts?

A: No. I reserve the right to not accept an excerpt, and I won't give a reason. But the reason will probably be that I'm already full, or I don't think your excerpt is a good match for my readers, or there are too many typos and errors.

Q: Do you accept short stories or interviews instead of excerpts?

A: No. Book excerpts only.

Q: Can I put an excerpt from an unpublished book in your ebooks?

A: No. Your books must be available for the public to download and/or buy. How else would you be able to track the success of this endeavor?

Q: Does that mean I have to have books in print or on Kindle?

A: Not necessarily. Personally, I think you'd get the most for your money if indeed you had an excerpt from one of your current in-print or Kindle books. But if you want to promote a free ebook you're giving away on your website, just to increase your site traffic, that's fine.

Q: Will you trade excerpt space, one of yours for one of mine?

A: Maybe, if you can prove you have more downloads than me.

Q: Can I pick the ebook I want the excerpt to appear in?

A: As long as there is still room. But keep in mind that my most-downloaded ebook might not be the best one for your excerpt. I encourage you to read the ebook, or at least the description. Different books have different demographics.

Q: Can I advertise in more than one of your ebooks?

A: Yes. Each one is $30 a month.

Q: What document format will you accept?

A: MS Word or rtf.

Q: Can I also include a book cover, or art?

A: No. That's a pain to format, and often comes out looking crummy. But you should include a section that lists your website, and where the book is available.

Q: You posted my excerpt, but now I want to make some changes. Can I send you an updated version?

A: Only if the month ends and you want to buy another month. Either send me something in publishable shape, or don't send anything at all.

Q: What if I want to cancel this in the middle of the month?

A: I'll remove it as soon as I have the time, once you ask. But you won't get your money back. I'll have already spent that on beer.

Q: I don't believe you've had that many downloads. Prove it.

A: Pay for a month, and you'll have access to my download data. I'll give your weekly updates via screenshots, so you'll know how many downloads your excerpt has had.

Q: Is $1 a day fair?

A: I have no idea. Maybe that's too much. Maybe that's not enough. Personally, I would pay a lot more than that to have my excerpts in a well-known author's books, because I believe people will buy my books based on the strength of my writing. But I may be a deluded egomaniac.

Q: Why are you doing this?

A: Besides the money? I believe that ebooks are the future. But I worry how authors will survive in a digital world where everything is free. This experiment is a chance to see if ebooks are a viable medium for advertising. Personally, I think an excerpt is much better than an ad, because it offers content and is viewed as a bonus rather than an intrusion. This makes it more effective, which indeed may help authors sell their books.

Q: Do you think this will work?

A: I dunno. I didn't think putting my books on Kindle would work, and I've made about eight grand so far. I know the hardest thing about being a writer is finding readers. I don't believe print ads works. I don't believe bookmarks and postcards work. I don't believe book trailers work. But I know this costs a lot less than all of those. In fact, I can't think of a cheaper way to promote your book.

Q: Okay, I want to try it. Now what?

A: Email me. But before you do, make sure you have realistic goals, and a way to track those goals. Unless you have some idea what it is you're expecting from this, you'll have no idea if it's working or not.

Q: When does this start?

A: I'm not sure yet. First I need to see what sort of response I get.

81 comments

The Great Ebook Experiment Part 2

I should win some sort of award for being disorganized, but if I won it I'd forget where I put it.

That said, I just realized when I switched ISPs, my previous ISP never killed my old email account. So I've spent the last few days wading through a few hundred emails from people who assumed I was ignoring them. And in doing that, I've been ignoring people who have emailed me recently.

But I'm very close to catching up. If you've contacted me about trying the ebook experiment, you'll hear from me by September 18th. If you haven't heard from me by then, try emailing me again at joekonrath(at)comcast.net.

Here's how this is going to work.

I'll need a ready-to-go chapter or excerpt from you, no more than 2500 words, sent to me as an email attachment in either MS Word .doc format or .rtf format.

Included at the end of the excerpt, please list:

1. The Title and your Author Name
2. Date and places the title is available
3. Your website URL
4. A brief two or three sentence bio

Here's an example:

"AFRAID by Jack Kilborn is available as an ebook, audiobook, and paperback, wherever books are sold. Jack Kilborn is the pen name for Joe Konrath, author of Whiskey Sour, Bloody Mary, and several other thrillers. You can find information about Joe at www.JAKonrath.com, where you can download many free ebooks."

I'll also need to know which ebook of mine you'd like the excerpt to appear in, along with two back-ups in case the first one is already full.

My plan is to upload the ebooks to Amazon Kindle on on my website on September 26th. They will run through all of October. After that, we'll pow-wow and discuss if this is getting results for people.

I've gotten a lot of private response about this, most of it favorable. Most people beleive:

Ebooks are here to stay.
Excerpts are a good form of advertising.
This is a pretty cheap experiment.

Will ads in ebooks become the norm? I'm betting yes. Ads appear in magazines, newspapers, radio, TV, and all over the Internet. Ebooks, with their zero cost to copy and distribute, seem to be a perfect medium for advertising. Especially non-intrusive ads that feature content.

Time will tell if I'm right...

11 comments

Ebooks and Free Books and Amazon Kindle, Oh My

FREE KINDLE EBOOKS! CHEAP E-BOOK DOWNLOADS! FREE AMAZON EBOOK! AMAZON KINDLE BOOKS FOR FREE AND CHEAP!

Now that I've satisfied the search engines with keywords, let's get down to business.

As I write this, **SERIAL**, a horror novella I co-authored with **Blake Crouch**, is the #1 Amazon Kindle download.

Why are two midlist thriller authors getting more downloads than huge bestsellers like James Patterson, David Baldacci, John Sandford, Lee Child, and Stephanie Meyer?

Because SERIAL is free.

Those familiar with my website know that I've been giving away free ebooks for years. You can go to **www.jakonrath.com/freebies.htm** and download the nine ebook novels and collections I'm currently giving away.

I've had 20,636 ebook downloads since I began using **http://www.bfnsoftware.com** to track them (I didn't use a download tracker the first year they were up.)

Rob Siders, has also been offering my ebooks for free, and so far 4401 people have downloaded them from his blog.

That's over 25,000 free ebooks I've given away, and it doesn't count other sites who host the books (which I encourage), or people copying the books for their friends (which I encourage.)

Why do I give ebooks away?

1. Writing is the Best Advertising. You can only become a fan of a writer if you read the writer. That's why I love selling short stories —I can reach new readers and expose them to my words. It's like the guy standing in front of the mall Chinese buffet, giving away samples of Kung Pow chicken. Some people try it, like it, then go inside to eat.

2. Books Are Expensive. Many people don't want to spend $24.99 or even $6.99 to take a chance on an unknown. And even fewer want to spend $14.99 on an ebook download. But people love a bargain, and free is the best bargain of all.

3. Free is Viral. If you Google Kilborn+Crouch+Serial, you currently get 6550 hits. Part of that is because of an orchestrated campaign done by Blake and I, in conjunction with my publisher, Grand Central. But part of it is because people are talking about it, picking up on it, repeating it, linking to it, etc. Publicity and promotion is free and easier to come by (if you're a midlister) when you're giving something away.

The goal, of course, is to find readers. Some of those readers will become fans. Some of those fans will become book buyers.

Is it working for me? Well, I get regular emails from fans who have enjoyed my free ebooks who then say they're going to buy my print books. My "regular" I mean a few a week. I'm even getting requests to write sequels to some of my freebies.

AFRAID by Jack Kilborn (my pen name) and my Jack Daniels series are selling well, both in print and as ebooks. Though I have decent distribution with these books (bookstores regularly stock them) I have to think that many folks sought them out rather than accidentally ran into them, and if they heard about them prior to buying them it might very well be because I work my butt off getting my name and words out there, for people to discover.

Now here is where the story gets interesting.

On February 18 of this year, I tried an experiment. My GPS, named Sheila, was murdered by my wife, and to buy a new one I put an ebook download on my website, asking folks for a 99 cent donation. The promotion was called **Tequila for Sheila.**

Repairing my GPS cost $80. PayPal took 35 cents out of every donation. So in order to repair Sheila, I needed 123 people to donate.

I was not optimistic. While my blog and website are popular, I didn't think folks would want to pay for a pdf download for many reasons. First, because digital media wants to be free. Second, because pdfs are not the preferred method of reading books. Third, because the only people who knew about this promotion were those who visited me already, which is a very limited distribution.

One of the biggest hurdles to overcome in the print world is distribution. The number of print books I sell is limited by the number of books printed, and the places they are for sale. If no one is aware of my books, no one will buy them. I strive to make people aware I exist, so readers seek me out rather than accidentally run into me, but I can only reach so many people.

So Tequila would only be known by people who already know me, which is extremely limiting.

And yet, to date, 226 people have donated to the Tequila fund, and the donations are still trickling in. So Shelia now has a hotter, younger sister named Leela.

It gets more interesting.

When AFRAID debuted on Kindle and the Sony Reader, my very savvy publisher released it for $1.99. This helped catapult it up the Kindle and Sony bestseller charts, and in the first month it sold over 7000 downloads, even though Kilborn is an unknown name.

So I got to thinking. High name recognition and limited distribution and a low price point, as with Tequila, resulted in 226 downloads in three and a half months. Low name recognition with major distribution and a low price point resulted in over 7000 downloads in a month.

What if I tried high name recognition, high distribution, and a low price point?

Which brings us to **http://dtp.amazon.com**.

Amazon actually allows authors to upload their own ebooks on Kindle, set a price, and earn 35% royalties.

This is either a closely guarded secret, or authors are just plain stupid, but as far as I know I'm the only published author taking advantage of this.

On April 8, **I uploaded eight ebooks to Amazon,** and sold them for $1.19 each.

These are the ebooks I've been giving away on my website for free, and are still available for free. But Amazon gets more visitors than JAKonrath.com, which means it is a much better distributor. That gives me the opportunity to reach people who don't know about me beforehand.

As I've stated before, digital content wants to be free. People don't like paying for downloads, whether they be pdfs or mp3s, because they are overpriced and there isn't a perceived value in binary code, which is all digital content really is. This is why 13 of the top visited sites on the Internet are file-sharing sites —it's often faster, easier, and much cheaper to steal digital content than it is to buy it.

Unfortunately, authors cannot release ebooks for free on Amazon (unless you go through your publisher, like I did with SERIAL.) You have to set the price at a minimum of 99 cents.

After adjusting my price several times, I settled on $1.99 per ebook, which Amazon discounts to $1.59, and nets me 70 cents in royalties each download —more than I make when I sell a $7.99 print paperback.

So how much have I earned in royalties in the 46 days my books have been available on Kindle?

As of this morning, I've had 1906 downloads on Kindle, and I've made $1370.12 in royalties.

That averages out to $30 a day, or almost $11,000 a year, for books that I give away for free.

Actually, I think that is a low prediction, as my Kindle sales have steadily increased, and only recently did I begin charging $1.59 (up from $1.19.) In the past week I've averaged $37 a day.

So why the hell isn't every author with a shelf novel or an out of print book doing this?!?!

It gets even more bizarre, when you start looking at bestseller lists.

Currently, my ebook **The List** is the #1 Kindle bestseller in the Police Procedurals category.

Who are #2 through #14? Multiple titles by Jeffery Deaver, James Patterson, James Lee Burke, JD Robb, and Michael Connelly.

Who is #15? **Whiskey Sour** by JA Konrath, which my publisher smartly priced at $3.96.

My ebook **Origin** is #3 on the Occult bestseller list, being beaten by two Charlaine Harris titles. But I'm outselling Stephen King, which is the only time that will ever happen.

Now, eleven grand a year isn't a huge amount of money, but I consider it pretty much a gift, and it really helps supplement my writer income. I'm not doing it for the money, though. I'm doing it for the same reason I continue to give away ebooks: to spread brand awareness and name recognition and find new readers and fans.

This is the future. But no one else seems to see it.

Well, that's not entirely true. **Boyd Morrison** is outselling me on Kindle, doing the same thing I'm doing: good product, low price point. Even though Boyd has been blurbed by some major bestsellers, he hasn't gotten a print contract yet. I stress "yet" because eventually NY Publishing is going to see Boyd's success on Kindle and want a piece of it.

Stephen Windwalker knows more about the Kindle than anyone on the planet, and publishes the excellent blog **Kindle Nation.** Stephen has been a huge supporter of my ebooks, and I owe him a lot of beer for his efforts in promoting Afraid, SERIAL, and my Kindle titles.

If you find this topic interesting, you need to check out the **Kindle Boards**, a forum dedicated to all things Kindle. Lots of smart people there who understand how to effectively use the Kindle.

Not so incidentally, the Sony Reader will soon institute a program allowing authors to upload books.

Let's recap:

1. Ebooks are good, because they help get your name and words out there.

2. More people are reading ebooks. Walmart now sells the Sony Reader. The Amazon DX will be out this summer, and Kindle has an iPhone app. And everyone with a new ereader wants content for that ereader.

3. The cheaper you are, the more you'll sell. You can even outsell major bestselling authors.

4. Free is better than cheap. Many more people will download free than cheap, so you'll reach many more people.

5. Distribution still matters. If you want big numbers, you get more downloads on Amazon than you will on your homepage.

6. There is money to be made. Like the POD industry, Kindle is getting diluted with overpriced self-pubbed crap. Don't be overpriced self-pubbed crap, because that doesn't sell. But if you're a good writer, a smart marketer, and can live with selling your book for $1.59, you can make some cash.

7. This is the future. Don't get left behind.

Any questions?

32 comments

Stealing The Future

I was taking a writing break, surfing the net, and came across Steal This Movie 2.

It doesn't directly address copyright infringement, or offer any solutions. But it does a very good job of explaining why copyright infringement exists, and is unstoppable. It's 45 minutes long, and well worth your time if you have any interest in the future of ebooks, concerns about illegal filesharing, and questions about what the future holds.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xpXK8mDTiNg

One of the ideas I found to be the most compelling was the concept of fences.

In the past, property (including intellectual property) had owners. If you owned a bicycle, or wrote a book, it existed as a physical object. To protect your property, you could build a fence around it, so it wouldn't be stolen. Then you could decide what to do with your property. Sell it. Give it away. Throw it away.

But there are no fences anymore. Intellectual property can be copied and distributed, and there is no way to protect it. In fact, the internet was created so people can share and copy information.

I've talked before about gatekeepers. In the past, TV studios, movie producers, and publishers have decided what media the masses can see.

The Internet is changing that. Now, everyone can produce media. The way the trend is going, there won't be any gatekeepers. Or at the very least the ones who exist will have more competition and fewer ways to make money.

For a society, that seems to be a good thing.

But is it good for a writer?

While YouTube has shown that a lot of people can produce media —media that can take viewers away from the TV shows and films produced by the gatekeepers —it hasn't shown how those media creators can make money. The money YouTube generates goes to YouTube, not the people uploading their movies.

And the majority of people uploading content to the Internet aren't uploading their original content. They're uploading media paid for by the gatekeepers.

If you're an artist who wants to earn a living, the way to get paid is to work for the gatekeepers.

But how long will these gatekeepers exist in their present form? How long before the media shared by individuals —both original and pirated —reaches more households than the established distribution networks run by the gatekeepers? And what will happen when that tipping point occurs?

In our desire to share and copy media, we're destroying the institutions that create the media.

But here's the thing. We're only destroying the institutions. We're not destroying the artists.

I don't believe the incentive to create is directly tied in to a paycheck. I wrote many books before ever earning a dime. And if the publishing world collapses, I'll still write books.

If people have an interest in reading me, money will somehow follow suit.

After viewing Steal This Film 2, you won't walk away thinking this is the end of media.

In many ways, it's more like a vibrant new beginning.

39 comments

In Defense of Print

Lately the majority of email I get, and the authors I meet, all want to know one thing:

Are ebooks going to replace print books?

Right now, ebooks are a supplement to print, much like audiobooks are. They're less than 2% of book sales. Some industry pros think they cater to a completely different audience than print, and the two can coexist peacefully. Other industry pros are in complete denial. At a recent convention, I was talking to a well known agent about how publishers are artificially inflating the cost of ebooks by charging etailers hardcover prices, and this person told me "You're making me angry. I can't talk about this with you."

Amazing. Ebooks are the big elephant in the corner of the room that everyone sees but refuses to acknowledge, even as it craps all over the floor.

I don't reach hasty conclusions. I like to gather information and learn all I can about something before forming opinions or predictions.

Anyone who reads this blog knows that I do believe ebooks are the future. I believe this based on my personal experiences in publishing, and what I know about the industry. I can also draw conclusions based on my knowledge of other media industries, namely music and newspaper, and my interest in the Internet, digital media, file sharing, and formats.

I'm still in the minority. People are fond of quoting me, or pointing others in my direction, but I haven't seen any industry professionals brave enough to either agree with me, or open a debate with me to disprove my assumptions.

But I have seen a lot of statements, and heard a lot of questions, repeated over and over. Here are a few that stand out:

I love the feel of a regular book.

I hear this a lot. The tactile experience of cracking open the spine and turning the pages. The smell and feel of paper. We grew up reading paper, and we have a good relationship with it that fosters warm feelings.

But what if we grew up reading ebooks? Would paper have a single advantage? Who's to say you can't form that same bond with an ereader?

Actually, if you've ever listened to someone who owns a Kindle, you'd know that not only can you have feelings for digital books, but the feelings are even stronger than with print. Whenever I meet an ereader owner and ask them if they like it, they don't just say yes and move on. They evangalize.

These people are so enthusiastic, so happy about their discovery, that they gush on and on AND ON about it.

Remember that the written word can be written on anything, and it still has power. Books aren't on the page — books take place in our heads. While you can be nostalgic about the delivery system, I highly doubt you still listen to music on 8-track or 78.

I want a tangible product.

Me too. I have over five thousand books. I love owning them. I love how they look on the shelf. I love perusing my library.

But I'll be honest here. I used to have over a thousand cassette tapes. I loved owning them. I loved how they looked on the shelf. I loved perusing my music library.

Then CDs came along, and I repeated the love affair.

Eventually I got my first iPod.

I don't even own a CD or cassette player anymore.

I still love to own. But now I own digital files. I still love to persuse my music library. Except now I do it on iTunes.

Tangible is only a state of mind...

Ebook readers are too complicated.

If a computer is too complicated for you, than an ereader might be, too. But no too long ago, vacuum cleaners, clothes washers, and microwave ovens were considered complicated. Fear of technology is pretty common with the older generation. But the longer a product is around, the easier it becomes to accept, and to use.

Future ereading devices will become simpler and simpler as the developers strive to reach those late adopters.

Ebooks are a niche market.

Well, no duh. All new technology begins as a niche market.

But this is a niche market based on the written word, just like printed books. Except it has many advantages over books, and doesn't kill 40 million trees a year or involve shipping and returns.

By all accounts, more companies are developing ereaders, and more consumers are buying them. Ignore this at your own peril.

You can't autograph an ebook.

I've signed over a dozen Kindle covers, and one Sony cover.

When is some smart publisher going to give away skins or ebook covers that feature the cover art for their latest novel? Or at least sell them cheaply? Wouldn't it be cool to carry around a Kindle that looked like Whiskey Sour or Afraid? I think so too.

Ebooks can be shared and stolen.

The fear over digital rights being abused is real, but there are no clear indicators that sharing ebooks, free ebooks, or stealing ebooks have any effect on sales.

In fact, I think freebies promote sales. Which is why I still give away ebooks on my website, even though I'm selling the same books on Amazon and elsewhere.

Copyright can't be enforced in a digital world. Those who try are going to get more frustrated, protective, and paranoid, and ultimately they aren't going to protect a damn thing. Ask the MPAA, the RIAA, and the billions of people file sharing.

EReaders are too expensive.

The Kindle debuted in 2007 at $399. Two years later it's $259. Give it another two years, and we'll see $150, or less.

Tech prices come down. Always.

Books will never disappear.

I agree. There are billions of them on the planet.

But will the printed book remain the main mode of delivery for the printed word?

I doubt it. Anymore than newspapers remained the main form of delivery for news, or CDs remained the main form of delivery for music.

Remember all the music stores? Remember Coconuts, FlipSide, Tower Records, Musicland, and Sam Goody? Where are they now?

Amazon sets the price on ebooks, that's why they're expensive.

I've had a few industry pros echo this. So let's clarify it.

Yes, Amazon does set the price, BASED ON WHAT THE PUBLISHER SELLS IT TO THEM FOR.

Guess what? I bet Amazon, Sony, and the other etailers would love to open negotiations for fair and reasonable ebook rates, which would result in the price of ebooks going down, which would result in more people buying ereaders and ebooks.

But the print industry doesn't want that.

Ebooks hurt my eyes.

I hear this all the time. And, in the case of standalone ereaders, this is wrong.

E-Ink technology doesn't cause eyestrain. At all. It's as passive as reading paper.

Some lament the tech of ebook readers, saying black and white displays are so 1998. They're waiting for color models.

But the fact is, E-Ink is very technologically advanced, and reading in black and white (or grayscale) is the easiest on the eyes. Include the no-flicker technology, and E-Ink is high tech that just looks low tech.

If ebooks are so great, why haven't they taken off yet?

In one form or another, it can be said that ebooks have been around since 1993. So why haven't they dominated the industry like mp3s?

I believe there are two reasons.

First, there has never been a universal format. I've blogged about this before.

Second, because publishing doesn't want ebooks to dominate the market. Why would they? The traditional role of publishers in this industry is to print and distribute books. In an ebook world, their role would be largely reduced, if not completely eliminated.

If I were a publisher, I'd be doing several things in order to prepare for the future.

1. Drastically lowering the prices on my ebooks.
2. Making ebooks available on my website, so I didn't have to share profits with etailers.
3. Publishing my backlist inexpensively in ebook format, and securing rights to as many out-of-print titles as I could get my hands on.
4. Directing the majority of marketing and advertising dollars toward ebooks.
5. Partnering with etailers and ereader manufacturers and offering them exclusive content.
6. Moving toward a digital future where all ebooks are free, funded by advertising.

But I'm not a publisher. Or an agent. Or an editor, or sales rep, or publicist.

I'm just a writer.

Here's the thing, though. I'm secure I'll still have my writing job in ten years.

Since April, I've sold over 6000 copies of THE LIST on Kindle. It will soon be on Sony, iTunes, and B&N. I expect these numbers to climb dramatically over the next few years.

Now I'm actually contemplating a sequel to this book —a book that was rejected by NY publishers —to release exclusively as an ebook.

That's crazy. That's absolutely crazy. I've dedicated my life to getting into print. I've dreamed of having this career since I was a little kid. I've busted my ass trying to succeed in this business, and have the battle scars to show for it.

I love print books. They're the reason I became a writer.

But my career isn't about printing my words on paper. It's about reaching readers with my words.

If readers want to read my words on a Kindle, I'd be stupid not to give them what they want.

49 comments

Booty Call

Digital Book World is a two day digital publishing conference recently held in NY. One hot topic at the event was **ebook piracy**. The conclusions drawn were:

1. People are stealing a lot of ebooks. (surprise surprise!)

2. Publishers need to fight this with lawsuits, better DRM, takedown pressure, anti-piracy legislation, targeting upload sites, and ultimately fighting the pirates themselves.

Apparently, publishing has paid close attention to the music and film industries, who have been successful at stopping pirates with the above tactics.

Oh, wait a second... The RIAA and MPAA have NOT been successful at stopping piracy. In fact, they've done nothing but irritate paying consumers.

It's good to know that the smart folks in publishing are ready to spend millions of dollars to make the same mistakes, no doubt with a similar outcome.

Of course, no one invited me to speak at the conference, which is a shame, because perhaps I could have saved the publishing industry the heartache and financial trouble they're about to embrace with one simple sentence.

The Only Way To Fight Piracy Is With Cost And Convenience.

How do I know this?

Because I've done extensive experiments with ebooks. The cheaper the ebook, the more you sell. And if the ebook is free, the downloads are off the charts.

I also know how pirates think, because I'm a pirate. Yes, I admit to being one of the billion people on the planet who download copyrighted material.

In fact, I've downloaded all of my own ebooks and audiobooks for free from various bit torrent and file locker sites. I'm able to do this because I too am being pirated. A lot.

Google **konrath torrent** and you get over 14,000 hits. These are all sites where my work is being stolen.

Does it bother me that people are sharing my books online?

No, it doesn't. Because piracy hasn't hurt me financially.

Why is that? Especially since I can account for thousands of illegal downloads of my own material?

Because I'm still making money. I don't think piracy has hurt my sales. In fact, I think it helps my sales by giving me a wider distribution network and greater brand recognition.

My self-pubbed Kindle titles are $1.99 or less. Since last April, I've sold over 20,000 books on Amazon.

Want to hear the funny thing? These same ebooks are available for free on my website. For FREE.

Does free hurt sales? Apparently not.

I've already blogged that if I had the rights to my in-print books, I could make a bigger profit selling them for $1.99 on Kindle than **I'm making with the prices my publishers have set.**

Cheap sells. Free sells even more. And if you make it easy for people to get your product (like pressing a button on a Kindle or an iPhone) they won't bother going to Pirate Bay or Rapidshare or Limewire or Megaupload or Isohunt.

File sharing is a pain. It can take a long time to download a file. The files can get corrupted. Sometimes they're tough to search. Often you can't find what you want. There are viruses. Seeding files takes up bandwith and harddrive space, and there's always a fear that The Man will send you a letter saying they'll sue you.

How much easier would it be if the large publishers, instead of adding extra copyright protection and hiring a team of lawyers and tech guys and lobbyists to fight piracy, just made their downloads cheaper?

Malls are dying. Main streets are dying. What's taking their place? Wal-Mart.

Wal-Mart has shown that if you offer customers inexpensive one-stop shopping, they'll spend money.

iTunes has shown the same thing.

Amazon hasn't been able to do that yet, because publishers insist on DRM (which consumers hate) and high prices for ebooks. $9.99 for a bunch of ones and zeros is overpriced. But if it were up to the publishers, they'd charge $14.99 and more for their ebooks.

Amazon is fighting back, though. In June, they'll begin paying ebook authors a 70% royalty rate.

Let's play the numbers game. Let's say a midlist author, like, oh, JA Konrath, uploads a new Jack Daniels book on Amazon and sells it at $2.99. A coffee at Starbucks costs more than that.

Let's assume JA Konrath can sell 10,000 copies per year of an Amazon title —something he's proven he can do. The 70% royalty rate will mean he earns 20k. PER YEAR. For just the erights.

This is more than most fiction writers earn on a single book for all rights: hard, soft, audio, ebook, movie, and foreign.

Shouldn't publishers try to follow Amazon's example, rather than continuing to charge hardcover prices for ebooks, which have no shipping or production cost?

That's what I'd do. But no one is asking me. No one invited me to speak at Digital Book World.

It's impossible to stop piracy. The whole reason the internet was invented was so people could share and trade information and media.

But it is possible to co-exist with pirates, and make a good living doing so, by making sure ebooks are easily and cheaply available.

Instead, it looks like we're going to see the publishing industry make the same mistakes the music and movie industries have made.

Copyright cannot be successfully defended in a digital world. Period.

Human beings are genetically wired to share information. And the internet has made it easy.

Publishers should be taking advantage of both human nature and the internet. Instead, they're gearing up for a fight they can't win.

Oh, and since I anticipate the comments saying, "If books are free, how can we make money?" I want to restate that authors will be able to make money on free downloads someday.

Let's say a well-known author releases a free ebook. But there's a catch. In the ebook, there are fifteen print ads, like you'd see in a magazine. Each ad costs the advertiser 2 cents per impression, which is comparable to other internet advertising.

That means each free download will earn the author 30 cents.

More than 100,000 people have downloaded my free ebook, SERIAL.

If I'd sold ad space for 2 cents an impression, I'd have earned 30k in less than a year. Even more money than I'd earn selling 10,000 ebooks for $2.99 each.

Of course, I've been saying this for a few years now. And I'll keep saying it until someone finally listens.

I just hope, by the time this is over, there will still be some publishers around to listen.

43 comments

Selling Paper

Remember my last blog entry, where I talked about Ebook Piracy? During the Digital Book World conference, the president of Macmillan, a very large publisher, called for all publishers to fight piracy, citing some of the same tactics that were unsuccessful for the MPAA and RIAA.

Since then, Amazon has stopped selling Macmillan titles.

The reason seems to be that Macmillan wants Amazon to raise their ebook prices, and Amazon refuses to.

This is being discussed in more depth on the Amazon Forum.

As it currently stands, Amazon buys ebooks from the publisher at 50% of the hardcover price, then prices those ebooks at $9.99 or less.

In other words, Amazon is losing A LOT of money on every ebook sale.

As far as I know, Amazon hasn't come out and said why it has decided to take a loss for each ebook it sells. If I were to guess, I'd say there are several reasons for this. They want to get a large share of the growing ebook market. They want to sell Kindles. They want to price competitively, and charge what they feel their customers are willing to pay.

Personally, I think Amazon knows that $14.99 for an ebook is too much, especially considering it costs nothing to distribute and manufacture.

So, since the Kindle first appeared, Amazon has been losing a lot of money by selling ebooks.

Macmillan wants Amazon to operate like Apple, which offers publishers a way to set their own price.

But shouldn't Amazon be able to sell things for whatever they decide to sell them for?

The loss-lead has been a mainstay in retail since the beginning of retail. Black Friday doorbuster sales are a perfect example of that.

So Macmillan tried to tell Amazon what to do, and Amazon stopped selling their titles, and now the Macmillan authors are suffering.

But let's take a closer look at why Macmillan wants Amazon to charge higher prices for ebooks.

It would have really sucked to have been a buggy whip manufacturer when Henry Ford introduced the Model T. But technology changes things, and it isn't always fair.

As far as technology goes, print has had an incredible run. This single format has lasted hundreds of years. Contrast that to music. In my lifetime, I've seen reel to reel, 8 track, LP, cassette, digital audio tape, CD, mp3, and now a host of lossless formats like flac, ape, aac, wav, etc. Go back to my grandmother's time and

there were 78s and Edison cylinders. Lots of format changes in just a hundred years. And during each change, there were those who lost and made money.

Print has reigned since Gutenberg. But now the times are changing.

Publishers need to figure out what it is they do. Is it ship and sell paper? If so, that costs money, and they need to price books at a high cost and pay the author a fraction of the retail price.

But if a publisher's job is to help storytellers reach a readership, through vetting, editing, formatting, cover creation, and distribution, that can now be done in a much cheaper way, digitally.

So let's look at what a publisher does, and some of the costs involved.

Print publishing has a lot of overhead, and a LOT of waste. A 50% sell through (the number of books printed vs. sold) is acceptable, and returns are acceptable (any book shipped can be returned for a full refund.)

What if Chevy only sold 1 car out of every 2 it produced? What if Costco could ship back any old bananas it couldn't sell and get a full refund from the banana grower?

This is a very bad business model, and it is what publishing uses.

Publishers acquire manuscripts, and spend a lot of time, money, and energy doing so, because acquiring and publishing a book is a big investment (an investment that often fails to earn a profit.)

In the current model, publishing is NOT about connecting storytellers and readers. It's about selling as much paper as possible. They print paper, ship paper, use paper to advertise their paper. Paper, paper, paper.

In an ebook world, there's no paper. No printing. No shipping. No catalogs. No ARCs. No print ads.

Editing, proofreading, cover art can be outsourced. How much would this reduce costs?

No expensive Manhattan offices. No editor expense accounts. No sales reps or marketing department. No employee benefits.

Print publishers see this future, and are trying to use the current system as a pricing structure for the future system, because they don't want to change.

That won't work. People don't want to pay $9.99 for a DRM restricted ebook that can only be read on a single device. That's why ebook piracy is on the rise.

Rather than figure out a strategy that will work, publishers are instead circling the wagons, making the same mistakes the RIAA and MPAA did.

Because publishers are in the business of selling paper, and they think a digital book is just another type of paper.

Why are they doing this?

One reason is because of history.

Historically, we were told what to read, watch, and listen to.

In the past, artists needed big companies behind them to manufacture and distribute their work.

When I was a child, there were three television networks. If I wanted to watch something at 7pm on Thursday, my choices were limited.

Radio and record companies decided what we listened to. Hollywood told us what to see in the theater. And publishers printed what they deemed fit for public consumption.

Gatekeepers (the few) chose what the masses (the many) got to experience.

Then along comes this internet thingy.

YouTube is one of the top ten most visited sites on the net. Why?

Because the viewer actually IS the gatekeeper.

We decide what we want to watch. We create videos ourselves.

It is an entire media empire built around the viewer. A video can get ten million views without any gatekeeper at all, because there is no cost and no risk.

Why not the same for ebooks? If the cream rises to the top on YouTube and goes viral, what is to stop an ebook from doing the same, if there was a forum for such a thing?

But instead of embracing the future, print publishers are going to try to fight to preserve the past. That's why they charge Amazon, Sony, and other retailers 50% of the price of a hardcover for an ebook. They don't want things to change. And they're inflating the price of ebooks to try and prevent that change.

That won't work. Formats change. New technology always comes out the winner. DVD beat VHS. CD beat cassettes. Cable TV beat network TV. Cell phones beat Ma Bell. And ebooks will someday beat print books.

But all isn't lost for publishers.

If I were a publisher, I'd start by acquiring out-of-print backlists. This is where Google and Amazon both dropped the ball. Google tried to scan copyrighted material without permission, and Amazon concentrated on public domain, rather than going after name authors and actually making some money off of ebooks, rather than losing money on each one sold.

There is a 4 billion dollar a year used book industry. The majority of everything ever published is out of print, and a good portion is still under copyright.

Acquire those rights (and not try to retroactively grab them like Random House did.)

A smart publisher or retailer with deep pockets could acquire thousands of books that have already been vetted and edited.

Once they did that, they'd be responsible for formatting and distribution, which is cheap and/or free. Pay fixed costs upfront, then earn forever.

But publishers can't think this way. That would mean they'd have to entirely restructure their business, and probably downsize dramatically.

Right now, rather than consider changing its business model, Macmillan wants things to stay how they are now. That makes sense. Why wouldn't they want things to stay the same?

But they're no longer the ones who decide what people must read. They don't have that control anymore in this new world. Now people have choices. One of the things that helps dictate choice is price.

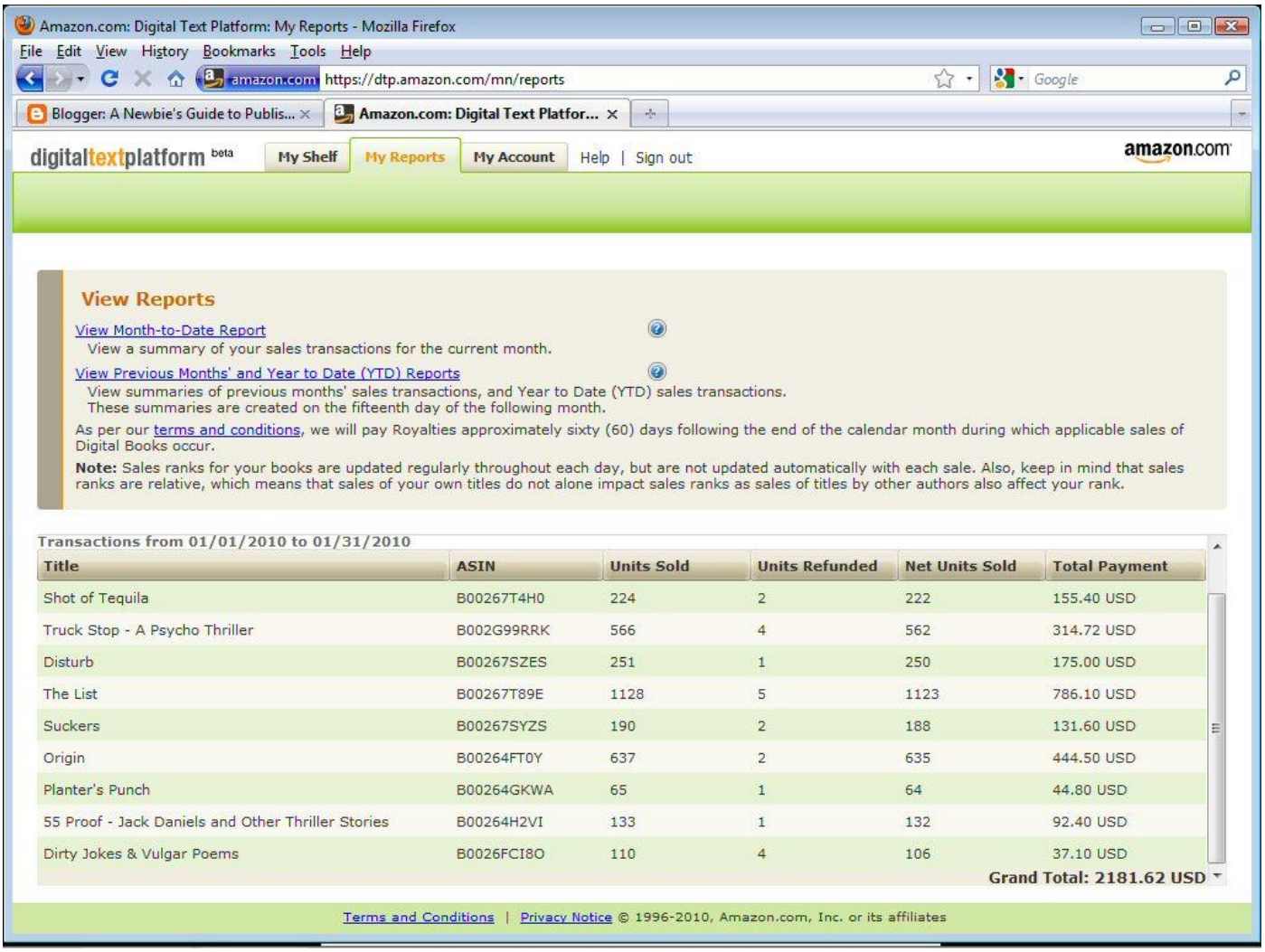
Amazon understands this, and prices accordingly.

I feel terrible for Macmillan authors. Several of my close friends are being hurt by this. And I wonder if other publishers are going to desperately band together and attempt to do the same thing. I'd be deeply upset if Amazon stopped selling my Jack Daniels novels.

But then, I did figure out that I could earn more money than Hyperion is earning for me, if I had the rights to those titles back.

But that's because I figured out you can make more money selling cheap ebooks than selling expensive ebooks.

Here's a screen shot of my January sales on Amazon Kindle to emphasize my point (and it isn't fully accurate because it's only 10:40am and I'm thinking I'll make a few more sales by the end of the day.)



Title	ASIN	Units Sold	Units Refunded	Net Units Sold	Total Payment
Shot of Tequila	B00267T4H0	224	2	222	155.40 USD
Truck Stop - A Psycho Thriller	B002G99RRK	566	4	562	314.72 USD
Disturb	B00267SZES	251	1	250	175.00 USD
The List	B00267T89E	1128	5	1123	786.10 USD
Suckers	B00267SYZS	190	2	188	131.60 USD
Origin	B00264FT0Y	637	2	635	444.50 USD
Planter's Punch	B00264GKWA	65	1	64	44.80 USD
55 Proof - Jack Daniels and Other Thriller Stories	B00264H2VI	133	1	132	92.40 USD
Dirty Jokes & Vulgar Poems	B0026FCI8O	110	4	106	37.10 USD

In June, my Amazon royalty rate will go from 35% to 70%.

So I'll be looking at 40k per year on these old titles that NY Publishing didn't want.

I'll earn almost as much on a $2.99 download than I earn on a $24.95 hardcover.

And why shouldn't I? I'm the writer.

I don't have any benefits. No heath insurance. No retirement fund. No 401k. No expense account for lunches. No holiday bonuses.

I live off of advances, and bi-annual royalty checks, and I'm one of the lucky ones. I actually am making a living at this, whereas the majority of my peers cannot.

And let me say, for the record, that I love paper books. And I've loved the publishers I've worked with, and think many of the folks in publishing are some of the smartest and coolest people I know.

But I believe publishers need to switch their focus from selling paper to connecting storytellers with readers.

Unlike the buggy whip, publishing isn't a niche market. It can change with the times. But it will be a painful change.

You can stack up sandbags against the tide. Or you can ride the wave.

C'mon, Big NY Publishing. Put down the sand, and grab your surfboards.

95 comments

Digital Perception

Digitization has really screwed things up.

Whether the screw up is a good thing or a bad thing still remains to be seen. But recent talks of ebooks and piracy brings up two important (and I feel thought-provoking) issues.

First is the perception of ownership.

Second is the perception of value.

Ownership used to be an easy concept to grasp. If something exists tangibly (you can see, hear, taste, smell, and/or touch it) and it is in your possession (you bought it, traded for it, found it, created it, were given it), then you own it.

People get loans in order to own big things, like houses and cars, and until they pay off those loans, the bank is the true owner.

It's a pretty simple concept. Equally simple is the concept that if someone takes something you own without your permission, it is theft.

When we bring multimedia into the picture, things get sort of odd.

If you buy a CD, you own a physical object (the plastic disk) and also have the rights to listen to the music on it. You can legally sell the CD, though it would be considered illegal to make a copy for yourself first, because you're only entitled to listen to that content if you own the CD.

If you buy a song on iTunes, you don't own anything physical. You own a bunch of code that, when played on your iPod or computer, you can listen to the same as you can listen to a CD. You are allowed the rights to listen to that music depending on the terms of the sale. iTunes currently limits the number of computers you can have an iTunes account on (it's 5). If you try to transfer songs you bought to a sixth computer, you can't through iTunes.

If you listen to a song on the radio, you have the rights to hear that song, because the radio station and advertisers paid for it. It is within your rights to make a copy of that song from the radio and listen to it over and over.

It is not within your rights to borrow a CD from the library, make a copy of the CD, and listen to the songs over and over. That is considered theft.

So what constitutes ownership in a digital world?

If you digitally copy a song off the radio, and sync it with iTunes, do you own it?

I don't know the legal answer. I don't really care about the legal answer. I know I can record TV shows and cable movies, put them on a DVD, and keep them legally. I know I can buy used DVDs for dirt cheap and keep them legally. I know I can download pay-per-view movies, and depending on the terms, keep those movies for an extended period of time on my DVR, or forever on Tivo.

Do I own these movies or shows? Do I have the rights to watch these movies and shows?

If you Tivo a TV show, and skip through the commercials, is that stealing? The ads pay for the show. If it is stealing, I don't believe the average consumer cares.

Digitization has changed the perception of ownership in a digital world.

Those who create digital products know that these products are easy to copy and share. Even with the restrictions they put on these products (Macrovision, DRM, proprietary formatting) anyone with a bit of ingenuity can find their way around these copy protections.

In fact, a lot of people believe there should be no copy protection at all. If you legally buy a CD, it is yours to do what you want with. You can sell it, or loan it to your mom, or legally make a back-up copy.

These people wonder why they can't do that with intangible, digital media. They wonder why their rights are restricted.

If I bought a song on iTunes, shouldn't I be able to do the same thing with that song that I could do with a CD I bought?

And what of experiences? What constitutes ownership of an experience, rather than a tangible object?

If you sneak into the movie theater, it's stealing. You didn't pay for that experience.

If you borrow a DVD from the library, or watch it over at your friend's house, it isn't stealing, even though you didn't pay for the experience.

If you borrow a DVD from the library, and copy it to watch later, it is stealing.

If you Tivo the same movie to watch later, it's legal.

The concept of ownership is muddied in a digital world.

I'm sure there are laws that show the dividing line. I'm also sure that most people don't know, or in fact care about these laws. A movie is a movie. A song is a song. You can get them buy paying for them, or for free, through legal and illegal means.

In a digital world, without a tangible object (the plastic disk that is the CD or DVD), perception of ownership is cloudy.

But perception of value is not cloudy.

I don't know a lot of people who go into Best Buy and steal DVDs. They believe that it's wrong to do so. Theft of a tangible object means a monetary loss to the owner of that object. A tangible object has a perceived value beyond what the set price is, simply because it can be seen, heard, tasted, smelled, and touched.

Someone created it. It exists. Therefore, it has a perceived value.

I do know people who download music illegally. They feel it isn't theft, because there is no loss of a tangible object. They aren't paying for the experience the music provides, but there are other ways to experience music without paying for it, so why not download it for free? Downloading doesn't equate to a lost sale.

Now let's bring up books, since you all know I was heading there.

A book has a perceived value. That value varies wildly. You can buy a book for $24.95 new, or get an unread used copy of the same book in perfect condition for $3 at a used bookstore. What is the book truly worth?

What if you got the book from the library? Is the perceived value of a book in the ownership of the tangible product, or is it in the experience of reading the story?

If a book is only read once, the reader who bought it for $24.95, and the one who bought it for $3, and the one who got it from the library, all had the same experience.

In a normal system of supply and demand, goods are worth what consumers are willing to pay for them, dependent on the number of goods and the number of consumers. Those who want a book right away are willing to pay a higher price. Other are willing to wait for it to be sold used, or for the cheaper paperback edition, or they put their name on the library waiting list. While the experience of reading is the same, and the prices varies, there still is a perception of value because the book is a tangible object. Books are loved, treasured, shown respect. Books are our friends. We display them proudly in our homes.

Now along come ebooks.

The perception of ownership is tougher to define with something that exists digitally, as a bunch of ones and zeros in binary code.

But what's really tougher to define, is the perception of value.

A print book exists as a physical object, and has a perceived value based on supply and demand.

With ebooks, the supply is unlimited. They can be reproduced and delivered for free (or for pennies.)

Even though the experience reading an ebook is the same experience as reading the $24.95 hardcover or the library copy (and by experience I mean the act of the words being absorbed by your mind), there is a much lower perceived value in ebooks.

Because ebooks aren't tangible. Everyone believes they cost less to create and distribute than their print counterparts. And they're correct. They do cost less, and they aren't tangible.

And their intangibility makes the perception of ownership sketchy. Do you own an ebook if you buy it? Or do you only own the rights to use it on a specific device? Is that true ownership?

It's easy to price a print hardcover at $24.95, because the market will decide if it can sell at that price. Only so many exist. Supply and demand.

But I believe publishers are making a mistake trying to use a supply and demand model, and its pricing structure, with ebooks.

Because the perception of ownership of ebooks is sketchy.

Because the perception of value of ebooks is lower than with print books.

And because ebooks, like all digital media, are damn easy to copy.

There aren't many bootleg print books. Costs too much to print and bind, and there are no outlets to sell them.

There are a lot of bootleg DVDs. They cost less to produce, and there are markets for them.

But there are a lot more illegal digital movie downloads than there are pirate DVDs.

It's much harder to stop illegal movie downloads. One reason is because they aren't being sold —they're being shared. Another reason is because the people sharing them are numerous, individual users.

In fact, there are over a billion of them.

Downloading illegal movies is a pain in the ass. For a good quality, lessor known movie, let's say something 8gbs, it can take weeks, even with a lot of bandwith and a decent server.

DVDs have come down so much in price, I'd much rather pop over to Best Buy and spend $5 on a new copy of the Bad News Bears than download one. (the original, not the crummy remake)

Still, a lot of people experience movies by pirating them. And they don't find it any more wrong than borrowing a movie from the library or recording it on Tivo. Because perception of ownership and value is different for digital products.

Now publishers want the price of ebooks to be high, for several obvious reasons.

First, they don't want ebooks to cannibalize print sales.

Second, because they make a larger profit on high priced ebooks.

Third, because if ebooks fully take over, their role in the publishing process could become greatly diminished.

But ebooks aren't subject to the rules of supply and demand, because they can be copied and shared by pressing a button. And because the consumers have a lower perception of an ebook's value, but still want the experience, I predict they won't pay what the publishers are asking.

The consumers will go elsewhere.

One growing option is piracy.

Downloading a 4.7 gigabite DVD movie, at 1mb per second, takes over an hour.

Downloading 30 ebooks in .txt format takes 8 seconds.

Downloading 1300 ebooks in various formats (epub, mobi, pdf, doc) takes 13 minutes.

Is it really in publishers' best interest to price ebooks at $14.99?

Is it in authors' best interests?

Is it in readers' best interests?

One of the headlines in Publisher's Weekly today was "Agent Community Happy With Macmillan Move."

Well-known and respected agent Richard Curtis called it a "terrific thing." Curtis said the move "restores control of book pricing—on both e-books and print—to the publishers," and that this is the healthiest thing for the industry.

You're free to draw your own conclusions. I've drawn mine. I believe that people won't pay $14.99 for ebooks. It will lead to fewer sales and more piracy. I believe the way to fight piracy is with cost and convenience. I believe a cheap, or free, ebook model is coming in the future, no matter how much the entire industry seems to be hoping otherwise.

But then, who am I?

I'm a writer.

The reason the publishing industry even exists is because of writers.

We create the content. And in most cases, we get paid very little for this.

Now Amazon and Apple are offering writers 70% royalty rates on ebooks, and the ability to set our own prices.

"A terrific thing"?

Indeed it may be. For the writers

But not for the publishers and the agents.

113 comments

You Can Pry My Paper Books From My Cold, Dead Fingers

People have an emotional attachment to printed books. So much so, that the most repeated argument against the universal adoption of ebooks is "I love print, and no ebook will ever be able to take its place."

Let's analyze this position. At its heart, the argument is emotional, not logical, for reasons this essay will explain. But an emotional response is still a very effective one. We're an emotional species, and the history of mankind shows that emotion often dictates our actions.

Looking at the history of technology, it isn't too often that a new tech completely replaces the tech that existed previously. The automobile became the preferred method of personal transportation, but many people still own horses, and every big city offers the expensive horse and buggy ride around town.

Consider the bow and arrow. When gunpowder was invented, a natural assumption could have been that there would never again be any use for arrows. Yet archery is still a thriving business, and you can go into any sporting goods store and by a crossbow.

People used horses to get from point A to point B. People used bow and arrows to hit a target from a distance. When cars and guns came, it was easier to get to point B and hit targets using these new techs. As a result, they became the widely adopted methods to complete these tasks.

Let's say that a technology used to complete a task has "destination value." The goal is getting the task done, and if one tech is advantageous over another tech, it often becomes the preferred method.

But there are still archery ranges and horse riders. That's because these offer an experience as well as a destination value. It's fun to get to point B on a horse, and ask any Ted Nugent fan about his affinity for the compound bow.

Sometimes it isn't just about the destination value. Sometimes the journey is also important.

Let's call this experience "journey value." It's a large part of the reason the horse and bow never went away.

These techs, however, aren't media.

Media, by definition, is a delivery system.

But is the end result the destination? Or does the journey also have value?

Let's use the music industry as an example yet again, because I believe there are parallels to the publishing industry.

The LP was the dominate music format for years. 8 track tapes were invented as an alternative, and though they had some advantages (you could now play music in your car) they didn't replace LPs.

But in the case of both the LP and the 8-track, they had similar destination value. They both allowed you to listen to a song. Their comparable journey value was negligible. How you listened to the song really didn't add much to the experience. The point was being able to listen to a song, not the format the song was in.

Along come cassette tapes. These had an advantage over 8-tracks and LPs, because they could record music. But they didn't replace LPs. Music stores sold LPs and cassettes side by side, and different consumers had different preferences.

Again, the experience is the song itself, not the delivery method. High destination value. Low journey value.

Then CDs came on the scene. It was originally thought by the industry that cassettes would be the death of LPs, because cassettes allowed for piracy. But the two mediums co-existed peacefully for years.

With the advent of CDs, the quality of music went up. Digital allowed for a lossless version of the musical artist's master tapes, with a delivery system superior to both LPs and cassettes.

Digital also allowed those original masters to be digitally remastered, to make the quality better than ever.

But consumers didn't warm up to CDs right away. First of all, the device to play CDs on was very expensive (I recall it being the most expensive part of a stereo system for several years after it was introduced.)

Music publishers, however, wanted people to adopt this new format. I'm not sure why. Maybe deals with CD player manufacturers. Maybe CDs had a higher profit margin than LPs and cassettes, or were easier to ship or mass produce. Whatever the reason, they wanted to push this new technology. And one of the ways they did this was to stop making as many LPs.

At one point, you would walk into a music store and it was all LPs, and some 8 tracks. Years later, it was about half LPs and half cassettes. Years later it was a few LPs, cassettes, and a growing CD selection. Then it was no LPs, a few cassettes, and mostly CDs. And eventually, it was all CDs.

CDs did provide a better way to experience a song. They sounded better (though a few diehard LP audiophiles may argue against the point.)

But a CD was just a vehicle for the thing that hadn't changed: the song.

The destination value of a CD was equal to the destination value of a cassette. They both played a song that you could listen to. And the journey value to each was negligible. They could both be played on portable Walkmans, and in cars. CD had better sound quality. Cassettes could record music.

The ability to record music adds an interesting dynamic. One of the things I find interesting is that cassettes weren't fully replaced by CDs until another invention came out: the CD burner.

Like the CD player, the burner started out as very expensive. And it actually wasn't invented as a way to copy music. It was invented as a way to store data on a personal computer. But computer users soon realized that this new technology could be used for piracy.

A CD is digital. This digitized information could be copied onto a computer, and then that could be copied onto a blank disk.

Piracy then evolved. A CD of 12 songs takes up a lot of megabytes. So users began to play with ways to compress this information, so more songs could take up less space. The MP3 was born.

With the advent of the MP3, something interesting and unexpected happened. Consumers of music, used to having a physical, tangible product that was the delivery system for their music (the LP, cassette, or CD) realized they didn't need the tangible product. Music could exist solely as digital binary code on a computer.

Apple looked at this user trend, and created a user-friendly device that played MP3s. Today, a computer company is the biggest retailer of music players (iPod and iPhones) and music itself (on iTunes) in the world.

You'd think that maybe Columbia Records, or some other big record company, would have been the leader in this industry and spearheaded the MP3 movement. But they didn't. They tried to block it, and hired lots of lawyers and sued a lot of people and invested a ton of money in copy protection that didn't work.

Or perhaps a major retailer, like Sam Goody or Musicland, would have realized they were losing CD sales, and taken a good look at where there customers were now getting music. Surely they could have found a way to make money off of this trend.

But they didn't. They went out of business.

So a computer company now rules the music industry.

Now let's go back to destination value and journey value. While Apple changed the way the world listened to music, the destination value was still the same thing it has always been: the song.

While listening to a song on an iPod is easier and has many advantages to listening to an LP, the song is still the important thing. How you listen to a song has continually evolved since Edison. But this experience can't be logically compared to shooting a bow or riding a horse.

When you close your eyes and listen to a song, it's for the song. It's not for the experience of using a record player, cassette player, CD player, Zune, iPod, or computer. The joy is not sticking the tape in, or putting the headphones on.

I'd say that the delivery system for music is not nearly as important as the music itself. Which is why we've had so many delivery systems, and will no doubt have many more in our lifetimes.

The song remains the same. Technology will always march on. And neither the big record companies, nor the big record stores, ever figured that out.

So let's bring ebooks into this discussion.

By stating they won't ever give up print books, print aficionados are giving value to the journey. The act of turning pages, the smell of paper, the feel of a book in their hands —to print fans, this seems to be just as enjoyable as the story itself.

I don't buy it.

The joy of riding a horse, while destination can be important, is also closely tied in with with the experience. You can ride a horse with no destination at all and still have a great time.

You don't need to hunt with a bow and shoot an animal to enjoy the feeling of pulling back the bow string and letting an arrow fly, no matter the target. Using a arrow is fun just shooting it into the air (make sure no one is around first.)

Can you picture yourself popping a CD into the stereo without music coming out? Can you imagine going for a walk with your iPod, putting in your ear buds, and selecting a song on iTunes with the sound on mute? That's journey value, and the journey value is zero.

Now picture being curled up on a couch with a book. Smell it. Feel it. Stick out your tongue and taste it if you so desire.

How often would you repeat that experience if the book had no words on any of its pages?

In fact, the journey experience with media is imagined. Or it's tied into nostalgia, pleasant memories, and previous pleasurable experiences. People love paper books because it was the only way they've had, in the hundreds of years the medium has exited, to experience a story.

But a story is not print on a page. It never has been.

A story is the writer's words in your head.

And guess what, print book aficionados? You can get the story in your head without dead trees.

(This is the first part of a two part essay about changing media technology, the role of piracy in adopting new media technology, and why an online bookseller is now feared as having a stranglehold on the future of publishing.)

53 comments

You Can Pry My Ebooks From My Cold, Dead Fingers

Recently, I've been blogging about the inevitable dominance of ebooks over dead tree books.

My own experiments show I can make more money selling ebooks than print.

I talked about how Amazon was losing money on Kindle ebooks sold, and envisioned a new publishing system involving estributors.

I refuted some of the common arguments against ebooks.

I predicted what the future of ebooks might be like. And how format is largely the reason we haven't fully embraced ebooks yet.

I considered the new agency model in selling ebooks, and came to the conclusion that publishers seem to care more about selling paper than connecting writers with readers.

I talked about the perception of ownership and the perception of value with print and ebooks.

Barry Eisler put forth a terrific argument about the inevitability of digital dominance.

And finally, I considered the difference between destination value and journey value, and concluded that the sentimental connection people have with print books will likely change, as it is no more compelling than an attachment to any other outdated method of media.

The overwhelming conclusion I've come to is that ebooks will one day be the preferred method of reading. This day is inevitable, and is coming quickly. Print publishers don't seem ready for it, and their methods to delay this eventuality will only lead to annoying their customers, piracy, and alienating their authors.

When I first talked about ebook piracy, I made an argument that cheap sells, free sells even more, and the only way to fight file sharing is with cost and convenience.

The music and movie industries tried to fight piracy, and failed. As a result, companies not previously associated with music and movies have become rich by doing three things.

1. Understanding consumer need.
2. Giving the consumers what they want at a price consumers are willing to pay.
3. Making it as convenient as possible for consumers.

As a result of this, the biggest music player maker and music seller is a computer company, and companies such as Tivo and Netflix, along with services like Direct TV and On Demand, are changing the way people watch movies.

Apple, and the companies that rent TV shows and movies through subscriptions, have discovered something interesting about the media habits of humans.

It used to be thought that we really valued the physical object the media was presented on. As consumers, it was important for us to own VHS and cassette tapes, DVDs and LPs, CDs and BluRay.

And yet, consumers have shown, in greater and greater numbers, that they don't care about the delivery system, and they don't care about ownership of a tangible product. They just want a cheap and easy way to watch the damn movie and listen to the damn song.

Where did this trend begin? When did we start to realize that ownership of an experience didn't require a physical object?

Oddly enough, I think piracy plays a large part in the acceptance and adaptation of new technology.

Let's look at three types of media. Music, movies, and video games.

I've already yakked at length about the many different formats music has had over the years, so I won't recap it here. But when we did fully embrace CDs, it seemed to coincide with the invention of the CD recorder. Being able to share media, ironically, led to the sales of more media.

The RIAA says that the widespread adoption of mp3s lead to more piracy than ever before. But perhaps piracy is what lead to the widespread adoption of mp3s. While music companies tried to block it, Apple created a player for it, and a store to sell the media. Apple looked at what consumers were doing, and responded accordingly.

In the latest video game console wars, is it a coincidence that the only system that has remained hack proof, the PS3, has also sold far fewer units than the hackable Xbox 360 and the Wii? The PSP and Nintendo DS are also hackable, as is the iPhone. All are flourishing.

People like being able to do what they want with their media, and with their media readers. They like to share, and copy, and customize. And as a result, more units, and more media, winds up selling on systems where piracy thrives.

There's a lot of movie and TV show piracy online. But it's a very odd phenomenon. On one hand, there are those who sneak camcorders into films still in the theaters, and upload their copies. There are also those that make 1:1 copies of DVDs and BluRay disks, complete with cover art, so you have a perfect copy of something you'd otherwise pay for.

But, believe it or not, the majority of movie and TV piracy isn't with first run flicks and full DVD copies.

It's with rips and with recent TV shows.

A "rip" is taking a movie and stripping out most of the extra stuff so it's still good quality, but under 700mb (a DVD is normally 4.7 to 8.5 gigabytes.) 700mb fits on a CD, but more often than not, pirates will watch these directly on their computers.

Right after any TV show airs, the torrent sites and file lockers are flooded with people sharing the latest episode of Lost or House or The Biggest Loser.

The conclusion I draw from this isn't that pirates are interested in stealing media. They're more interested in file sharing as a cheap and easy distribution method. You search for what you want. You download it quickly. You experience it.

So along come Tivo, On Demand, Direct TV, and Netflix. What do they do? They allow consumers to experience media cheaply, easily, and quickly. And consumers have embraced these distribution methods to the point where Blockbuster Video —the same dominant force that squeezed out all the mom and pop video stores across the country —is now themselves closing stores left and right.

Consumers have shown us what they want. Ownership of a tangible product is becoming less and less important. Downloading a song, or a movie, or a TV show —either permanently or temporarily through a subscription model —is how many people are deciding to experience media.

I've said before that piracy is human nature. The internet was created to store and share information. It's directly tied to how we communicate. That's why we lend each other blooks and movies, and send emails linking to YouTube videos, and link to each other's blogs and then Tweet the link on Twitter.

How do books play into this? A hardcover book is a luxury item in today's market. It's eight hours of entertainment for $30. That's a month's worth of movies on Netflix, or thirty songs on iTunes. And a paper book is far from an instant delivery system.

If books are going digital, as most seem to predict, the ability to share media, and get it instantly, will help advance the adoption of ebooks by the masses. And as companies like Apple and Netflix and Gamefly (for videogames) have learned, the masses dictate what they're willing to pay for this service.

Not the film producers. Not the music producers. And not the videogame producers.

It's a third party that stepped in, saw the need, and exploited it.

So along comes Amazon. They already have a huge advantage over any other third party. They're the largest online book retailer. It didn't take a huge leap in faith for Jeff Bezos to realize he could also become the biggest online ebook retailer, if they only had an ereader device.

Now the Kindle is the market leader. The technology is only going to become more widespread, more advanced, and cheaper, as time goes on.

Where are the print publishers? Why aren't they making ereaders? Why aren't they allowing for cheap ebook downloads on their websites? Why don't they have customer forums and subscription models? Why are the clinging to an outdated model so tightly that they're now demanding to set both wholesale and retail price of their products?

The videogame industry got it. The PS3, Xbox, PSP, and Wii all allow for downloadable games and online subscription-based play. And guess what? The PS3 finally got hacked. I predict sales will rise as a result.

People want inexpensive media at the press of a button. Books will follow the same model as movies, music, video games, and TV.

It will be an ebook future. A cheap, instant, ebook future.

And we'll embrace it. We always do.

38 comments

Kudzu and Kindle

All along, the goal has been to build a fanbase.

In the history of publishing, this was usually a slow and steady process. You write a book. Then you write another a year later. And another a year after that. Hopefully the publisher keeps them in print, the bookstore keeps them on the shelf, and the fans like them and talk about them. This linear approach, if kept up long enough, can lead to a career, and even a spot on the bestseller list.

But there's an easier way to achieve market penetration and saturation.

Instead of releasing one book at once, you release sixteen.

There's a plant known as kudzu, which is widely hated in the south because it takes over cropland. It grows fast, and uses runners to spread. Kudzu can quickly saturate an entire field. One patch becomes two patches, then four patches, then sixteen patches, and pretty soon it's everywhere you look.

I'm noticing a similar phenomenon with writing in general, and ebooks in particular.

I've always believed that being prolific and diverse are the two biggest things a writer can do to create fans. Because of this, I write a lot of short stories, in various genres. The effect works as intended. I've got a few hundred thousand novels in print. But my short stories have been printed millions of times. Each published story is an opportunity to gain a new fan, some of whom will buy my books.

This approach has served me well. I get a lot of fan mail about my short work, and it often leads to the intended effect; to point readers toward my novels.

But this still isn't literary kudzu. It's a slow, gradual build up (albeit faster than if I only did novels.)

Then along comes the Kindle.

For those new to my blog, here's a recap of how I got started on Amazon.

Ever since my first novel, Whiskey Sour, was published back in 2004, I've had a website, www.jakonrath.com. I understood early on that people on the internet are looking for free content, and the two main forms of content are information and entertainment. So, from the very beginning, I've had free downloads on my website. Lots of short stories, and several of my pre-Whiskey Sour novels that couldn't find publishers.

After the Kindle's debut, I had Kindle readers contact me, saying the pdf downloads I offered on my site weren't compatible with their ereader. Could I please somehow make my ebooks available on Kindle?

So I did. But I wasn't allowed to give them away for free. So after some experimentation, I settled on a $1.99 price point.

This was in April 2009. In ten months and a few days, I've sold about 26,000 ebooks. In the first fourteen days of February, I've already made $1600. My bestseller, **The List**, isn't just the number one bestseller in the Kindle police procedure category, it's the number one bestseller in the overall police procedure category.

In other words, I'm outselling print novels from Jonathan Kellerman, JD Robb, James Patterson, Robert Crais, Michael Connelly, Harlan Coben, John Sandford, and everyone else. (For the curious, this book is averaging 82 sales per day.)

That's pretty astonishing. All of these writers are NYT Bestsellers. I am not. I'm just a midlister with a low cost ebook.

But here comes the kudzu tie-in. I've recently learned that all six of my Jack Daniels ebooks are among my print publisher's top 50 Kindle bestsellers. These books are priced higher than $1.99. In fact, one of them costs $9.99.

On the Kindle police procedure bestseller list, I currently have 7 books in the top 100.

This is instant market penetration and saturation. Unlike a slow, gradual growth, this is more like kudzu, which pops up in a bunch of places at once and keeps spreading out. Different readers discover different ebook titles of mine, and it sends them to other ebooks.

The more chances you have to be discovered, the more you'll be discovered. Building a fanbase, which used to be linear and gradual, now becomes more like a patch of weeds, spreading out in all directions and at great speed.

So you want to be a Kindle bestseller?

The more quality content you have, the better your chances. Short stories. Out of print books. Unpublished work that your agent couldn't sell.

This is more than just a quick way to make a buck. This is getting a firm foothold in the oncoming digital revolution.

I used to be known as the guy who wrote nine unpublished novels and got over five hundred rejections before landing a book deal.

Now I'm known as the guy who pays his mortgage selling books on Kindle that NY rejected.

Be the kudzu. Join the revolution before everyone else figures this out and it's harder to get noticed.

22 comments

JA Konrath's 2010 Ebook Predictions

My guesses for the upcoming year...

1. Ebook readers will be available in stores for less than $99. I believe this is the magic price point, and the ability for consumers to purchase their device at their favorite department store will finally allow this tech to enter the mainstream.

2. Amazon will adopt Epub standard format. I've blogged about formats before, and how proprietary formatting is preventing worldwide acceptance of ebooks. The closest to a universal format is Epub, and once there are millions of non-Kindle ereaders out there, Amazon will want a piece of the pie and offer different formats.

3. Ebook readers will improve. Well, no duh. All tech improves as time goes on. But I'm talking about the look and feel of the device, not just what it can do. As advanced as ebook readers are, they still *look* low tech. Compare this to the iPhone or iPod Touch. These devices look, and feel, 21st century. Some ereader manufacturer will come up with a device that just looks right (the Nook comes close) and it will sell like crazy.

4. Ebooks will go multimedia. The potential for ebooks to change the way a book is experienced has not been explored yet. Author annotation, interviews, video, audio, extras, music, deleted chapters, short stories —these are all benefits that could be added to content at no cost.

5. A third party etailer will rise to prominence. Currently, people buy most of their ebooks online at Amazon. But someone with deep pockets will launch a big website and begin to gobble up marketshare. My guess is this site will be the first to begin offering the out-of-print backlists of published authors. Public domain isn't the key to success. Copyrighted work that is only available used is the key to success, because ebooks can make these vetted, professional books available again. It's a gigantic, viable, untapped market.

6. Estributors will become common. Where there are writers, there are folks who help writers and take a percentage of their income. Agents currently hold this position. But it won't be long until some smart folks realize they can make money being a liaison between the writer and the ebook world, and offer services that include editing, formatting, uploading, and cover art, so the only thing the writer has to do is write.

7. Print publishers will get savvy. Some major publisher is going to realize they can make more money selling ebooks for under $3 than selling them for $15, and they'll give it a try and be successful. Others will follow suit.

8. Ebook bestsellers will emerge. As more reviewing sites and blogs dedicated to ebooks rise up, word-of-mouth will propel some independent ebooks author to bestseller status. It's inevitable, and both the print publishers and Hollywood will take notice.

9. Print books will be packaged with an ebook version. Perhaps it will come on a CD or an SD card. Perhaps it will come with a code so the ebook can be downloaded for free. But some smart publisher is going to include the ebook with the print version. A really smart publisher would also include a download

for the audiobook version with the package. Then folks wouldn't mind paying $25 for a hardcover, if it came with those downloads.

10. Exclusivity. If an author is big enough, they are available everywhere: Amazon, Nook, Shortcovers, iTunes, Sony, etc. But someone is going to sign an author exclusively, so their book is only available in one etailer location, to lure people to their device and website.

11. I'll continue to pay my mortgage with ebook sales. I've been self-publishing ebooks on Kindle since April, and every month since I've earned enough to make my monthly house payment. I'm also going to release a novel exclusively as an ebook in 2010, as a long-term experiment, to see if I can earn more in five years than I could on my previous print deals. This is the beginning of a very long tail, and writers really do need to think about how much their ebook rights are worth over the course of their lifetime and beyond. Because that's how long this technology will be around.

What are your predictions for the upcoming year?

40 comments

Understanding Kindle Bestsellers

This blog title is misleading. I make no claim to understand why a book becomes a bestseller on Kindle. I have a few hypotheses, but no real way to test them.

So I'm going to ask you what you think.

Currently, I have four self-published ebook novels on Kindle, each priced at $1.99. As of right now (Feb. 17 at 7:20am) one of these novels has sold 1327 copies so far this month. Another has sold 519 copies. The third has sold 212. And the fourth novel has sold 166.

There's a big gap between 1327 and 166. And I've been scratching my head for months, wondering why that gap has stayed so wide.

Is it cover art? Is it genre? Is it the writing sample people can download for free before they buy? Is it the product description? Is it bestseller ranking (meaning a bestseller continues to be a bestseller because people see it on the bestseller list)? Is it word of mouth?

The natural assumption would be that this book sells the best because it is my best. But I don't feel it's better than the others, and neither do readers if we go by reviews and the email I get.

This gets even stranger, because if I look at the downloads on my website (three of these books are available for free on my site) the bestseller on the Kindle store isn't the bestselling download on my webpage, even though the ebooks all have the same cover art and description as their Kindle counterparts.

Color me confused.

These books have been on Kindle since April. One might think that the numbers would have reached some kind of equilibrium by now. That the biggest seller would slow down, and those who read it and liked it would be buying the other three books. Or that the top bestseller slot would change.

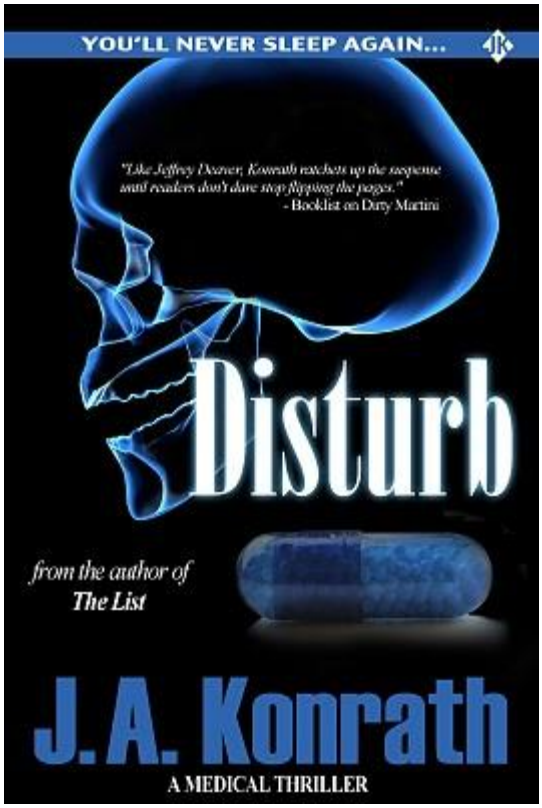
But it hasn't. These four books have been in the same bestselling order since April. Here are their total sales so far:

First bestseller: 9691
Second bestseller: 5014
Third bestseller: 2239
Fourth bestseller: 1716

My question to you is: why?

I'm going to post the covers and the product descriptions for all four. I'm also going to post links, if you're so inclined to download the free sample.

After you look at the covers and descriptions for each, tell me which you think is best, and why.



DISTURB

A medical investigator tormented by secret guilt.
A beautiful doctor with an illicit desire.
A millionaire businessman indulging a passion for murder.
And a human guinea pig who has been awake for seven straight weeks.

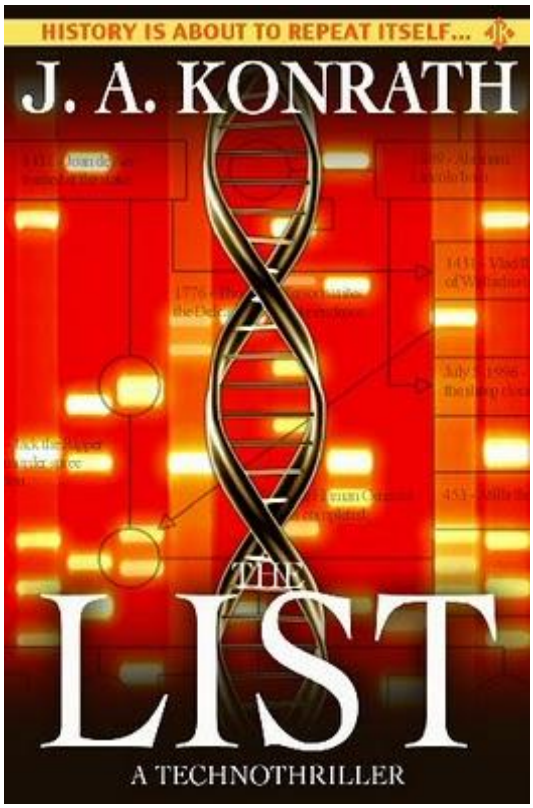
DISTURB by JA Konrath
You'll never sleep well again...

JA Konrath is the author of six mysteries in the Lt. Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels series, including Whiskey Sour, Bloody Mary, Rusty Nail, Dirty Martini, Fuzzy Navel, and Cherry Bomb. Disturb is Konrath's first medical thriller.

Disclaimer: This novel is filled with extortion, conspiracy, taboo sex, hidden secrets, shocking violence, and murderous betrayal. Not recommended for the faint of heart.

This ebook version also includes the bonus horror short story, "Dear Diary," about a very special pom pon girl.

THE LIST



A billionaire Senator with money to burn...
A thirty year old science experiment, about to be revealed...
Seven people, marked for death, not for what they know, but for what they are...

THE LIST by JA Konrath
History is about to repeat itself

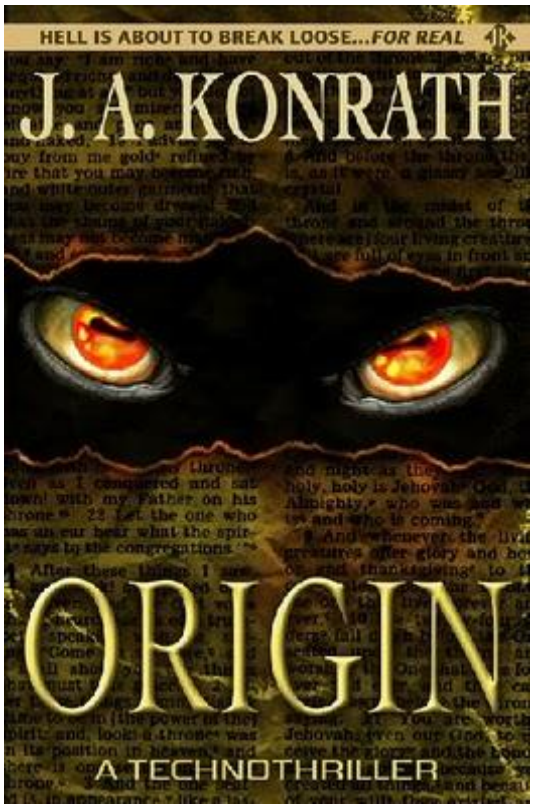
JA Konrath is the author of six novels in the Lt. Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels thriller series. The latest is CHERRY BOMB.

THE LIST is a bit of a departure for Konrath. It's a technothriller about a group of ten people who each have tattoos of numbers on the bottoms their feet, and don't know why.

One of them, a Chicago Homicide cop named Tom Mankowski, has had one of these strange tattoos since birth. When he investigates a violent murder and discovers the victim also has a tattooed number, it sets the ball rolling for an adventure of historic proportions.

To say more would give away too much.

Like the Jack Daniels series, The List combines laugh out loud humor with serious suspense and thrills.



ORIGIN

Thriller writer J.A. Konrath, author of the Lt. Jack Daniels series, digs into the vaults and unearths a technohorror tale from the depths of hell...

1906 - Something is discovered by workers digging the Panama Canal. Something dormant. Sinister. Very much alive.

2009 - Project Samhain. A secret underground government installation begun 103 years ago in New Mexico. The best minds in the world have been recruited to study the most amazing discovery in the history of mankind. But the century of peaceful research is about to end.

BECAUSE IT JUST WOKE UP.

ORIGIN by J.A. Konrath
All hell is about the break loose. For real.

SHOT OF TEQUILA

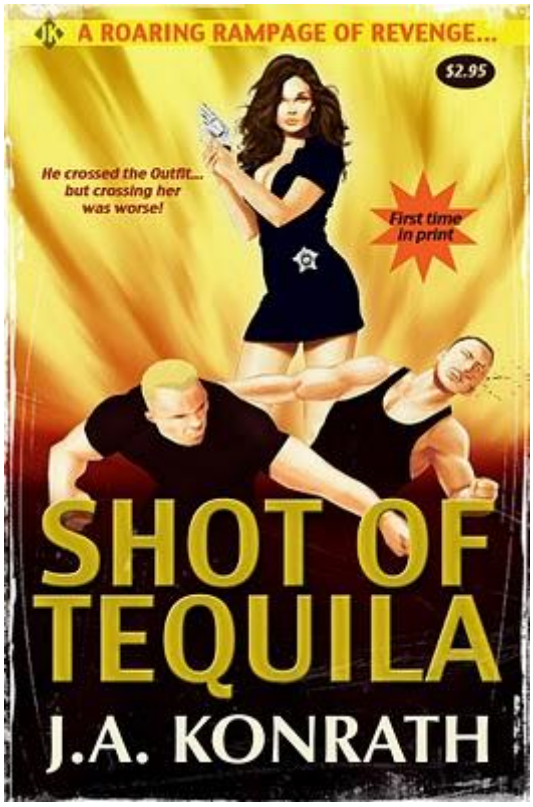
A GUTSY ROBBERY
Several million bucks, stolen from the mob...

A PERFECT FRAME
All caught on video, with no chance of redemption...

A RED HOT RECIPE FOR RAMPAGING REVENGE
Now one man must face the entire Chicago Outfit, a group of hardened Mafia enforcers, a psychotic bookie, the most dangerous hitman on earth, and Detective Jacqueline Daniels...

His name is Tequila. And he likes those odds.

SHOT OF TEQUILA by JA Konrath



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So tell me, based on the above, which is the most appealing? What's the best cover? What's the best description? Why is the bestselling ebook selling almost seven times the number of the least selling ebook, when they're all thrillers written by the same author and with similar styles?

I'm eager to hear your responses, because I flat out have no idea why one book sells more than the other three combined.

If you follow this blog regularly, or click on the links to read the free samples (you can download a Kindle reader to your computer for free), you already know which one is my bestseller. But please refrain from trying to explain why it's the bestseller, because that's attributing significance to an occurrence after it happens.

Instead, tell me what does or doesn't appeal, and if you had to buy one of these books, which one it would be and why...

Which JA Konrath Kindle Ebook Would You Buy First?

82 comments

JA Konrath Kindle Sales: 30k Ebooks In 11 Months

I uploaded my first self-published ebook for Amazon Kindle back on April 8, 2009.

As of this morning, March 4 at 9;23am, I've sold 29,224 ebooks.

I'm currently selling $1.99 ebooks at the rate of 170 per day. That means I'm earning around $120 per day just sitting on my butt. If this trend continues as-is, I'll earn $43,800 this year on previously published short stories and novels that NY print publishing rejected.

But I don't expect this trend to continue as-is. I expect it to explode.

In July, Amazon is doubling royalty rates for self-publishers, going from 35% to 70%.

I have no doubt, by the end of the year, I'll be making 5k per month on Kindle. And that's probably a low estimate.

So how am I doing this? What's the secret?

Here are my guesses as to why I keep selling well.

1. Being known. I already have some name recognition from my print books. There are half a million books of mine in print worldwide, and some of those readers go looking for me on Amazon and find my self-pubbed Kindle titles.

2. This blog. I have a blog called **A Newbie's Guide to Publishing** where I often talk about ebooks. That blog gets over a thousand hits per day, and some of those readers wind up becoming ebook buyers.

3. Low price. I've found the sweet spot for pricing to be $1.99, though that will go up to $2.99 when the royalty rate changes. Perhaps I could make a bit more money selling at $2.99 now, but that would mean some fewer sales, which would negate:

4. Being on the Kindle genre bestseller lists. The bestseller lists are chances for browsers to find you when they're looking for well-known books by well-known authors. In my case, they'll buy a Stephen King, James Patterson, or JD Robb, see me next to that author for only $1.99, and it's a one-click impulse purchase. It's worth a lower price to stay high up on those lists. Last week I had ten titles in the Police Procedural Top 100. I believe these lists become self-fulfilling prophecies. The more you sell, the more you sell.

5. Word of mouth. Or in this case, word of Google. If you Google me, you get a lot of hits. Lots of folks link to me, review me, read and recommend me. I did a lot of self-promotion for my print career, and that foundation still stands in over 100,000 mentions on the world wide web. This extends to Twitter and Facebook, and the kind folks who retweet and link to me.

6. Promotion. Strangely, I don't do much self-promotion for my Kindle books. Especially compared to my print books, where I've signed at over 1200 bookstores. I've posted my titles on a few Kindle forums, done a few Amazon blogs and Listmanias, and been lucky to get a lot of reviews and a few mentions by the mainstream media. But for the most part, my Kindle promo strategy has been hands-off. In fact, I know that

Kindlers hate too much blatant self-promotion, and will label you a spammer if you toot your own horn a lot.

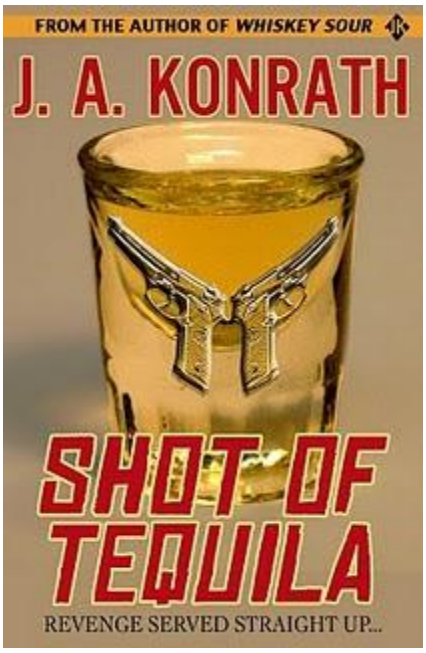
7. Cross Pollenation. It's no secret that I write scary books under the pen name Jack Kilborn. I want all JA Konrath readers to know this, and all Jack Kilborn readers to know he's really JA Konrath. So I've tied the two names together by writing the novella Truck Stop, featuring my series character Jack Daniels, and my villains from Afraid and SERIAL. I wrote SERIAL with Blake Crouch, ensuring his fans discover me. I wrote novellas with Tom Schreck, Jeff Strand, and Henry Perez, to make sure their fans know who I am. And I recently put ebook excerpts from my other titles in the back of my ebooks. Plus, I'm now trading excerpts with Robert W. Walker to hook even more readers. Remember my**Virtual Paper blog?**

8. Decent stories. Name recognition and cheap prices only go so far. If the ebooks aren't any good, sales will drop off. Not only should the writing be stellar, but the Kindle formatting should be perfect. A great story with terrible word formatting won't sell. Period.

9. Good covers and product descriptions. I just improved some of my covers, and saw an immediate uptick in sales. I'm also constantly adding to/tweaking my book descriptions. I've found that more information leads to stronger sales (as opposed to teasers with less info.) I also make sure my first line of description is "Only $1.99 for a limited time." By announcing the low pricing is limited, I encourage impulse buyers.

10. New content. Every few months I try to add another ebook to my Kindle store. The more books you have on Kindle, the greater your chances of being discovered. And if someone discovers you, and likes you, they'll buy more of your ebooks.

Speaking of covers, descriptions, and content, I took all of the feedback that I received when polling you folks for **opinions about my ebooks**, and I've updated some of the covers and descriptions based on your suggestions. Here is the new JA Konrath line-up on Kindle, with some new ebooks. These titles are each $1.99, except for SERIAL, which is free.



Click on each cover to be taken to its Amazon Kindle page.

A GUTSY ROBBERY
Several million bucks, stolen from the mob...

A PERFECT FRAME
All caught on video, with no chance of redemption...

A RED HOT RECIPE FOR RAMPAGING REVENGE
Now one man must face the entire Chicago Outfit, a group of hardened Mafia enforcers, a psychotic bookie, the most dangerous hitman on earth, and Detective Jacqueline Daniels...

His name is Tequila. And he likes those odds.

SHOT OF TEQUILA by JA Konrath

Book Description:

Shot of Tequila takes place in the early 1990s, and is both an homage to and a re-envisioning of classic action novels by authors like Mickey Spillane, Ross MacDonald, Donald Westlake, and Elmore Leonard, but with a more modern twist.

The breakneck action is intercut with scenes featuring Konrath's series hero Jack Daniels, here as a supporting character chasing the main protagonist.

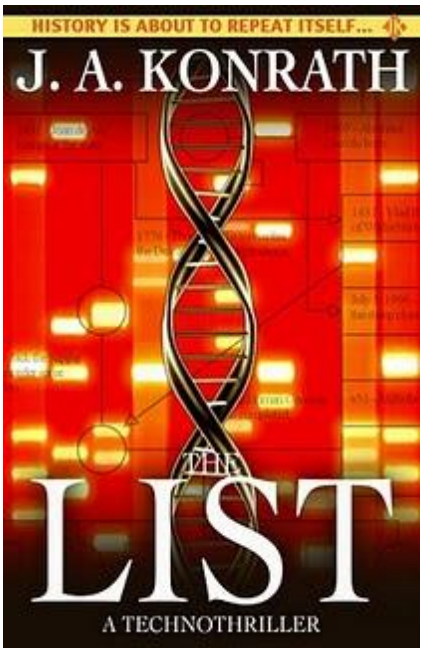
Edge-of-your-seat suspense, non-stop action, and dark humor punctuate this heist novel/fugitive-on-the-run thriller. Fans of Konrath's police procedurals will enjoy the slight departure from his normal writing style, while still finding familiarity with the setting and characters.

SHOT OF TEQUILA is approximately 75,000 words.

A billionaire Senator with money to burn...
A thirty year old science experiment, about to be revealed...
Seven people, marked for death, not for what they know, but for what they are...

THE LIST by JA Konrath
History is about to repeat itself

Book Description:



THE LIST is a bit of a departure for Konrath. It's a technothriller about a group of ten people who each have tattoos of numbers on the bottoms their feet, and don't know why.

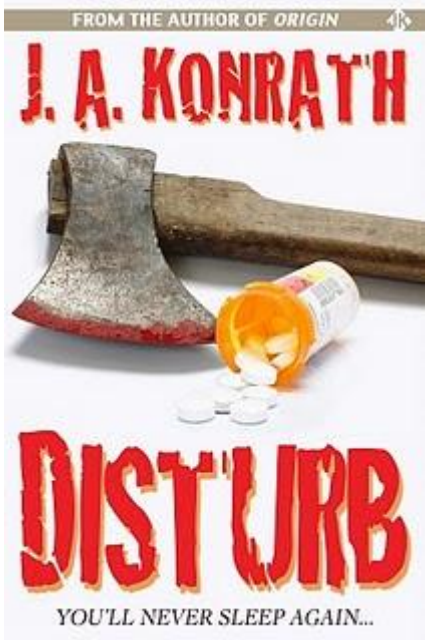
One of them, a Chicago Homicide cop named Tom Mankowski, has had one of these strange tattoos since birth. When he investigates a violent murder and discovers the victim also has a tattooed number, it sets the ball rolling for an adventure of historic proportions.

To say more would give away too much.

Like the Jack Daniels series, THE LIST combines laugh out loud humor with serious suspense and thrills.

THE LIST is approximately 82,000 words long.

A medical investigator tormented by secret guilt.
A beautiful doctor with an illicit desire.
A millionaire businessman indulging a passion for murder.
And a human guinea pig who has been awake for seven straight weeks.



DISTURB by JA Konrath
You'll never sleep well again...

Book Description:

It's the pharmaceutical breakthrough of the millennium. DruTech Industries proudly presents N-SOM, a pill that completely replaces eight hours of sleep. Feel totally refreshed, both physically and mentally, in just fifteen minutes a night.

The profit potential is boundless. Mankind's productivity will go through the roof. One third of a person's life could be recovered, for only ten dollars a dose.

The FDA sends CDER agent Dr. Bill May to green light N-SOM for American use. The pressure, both political and monetary, is tremendous. But Bill soon harbors fears that N-SOM may not be as safe as early reports indicate...

After meeting brilliant inventors Dr. Nikos Stefanopolous and his beautiful daughter Theena, Bill stumbles into an insidious cover-up that hinges on Emmanuel Tibbets, a human guinea pig who hasn't had a fink of sleep in over fifty days.

Bill's investigation soon unearths a snarled tangle of extortion, conspiracy, taboo sex, hidden secrets, and murderous betrayal.

When N-SOM's deadly side-effects are revealed, along with the shocking truth of how the drug is produced, Bill and Theena find themselves on the run from hired assassins, three letter government agencies, and a breed of psychopath unlike any ever known.

Billions of dollars, and billions of lives, are at stake. Can Bill and Theena survive long enough to expose the truth? Or will the world succumb to an evil that may bring about the extinction of mankind?

Thriller writer J.A. Konrath, author of the Lt. Jack Daniels series, digs into the vaults and unearths a technohorror tale from the depths of hell...

1906 - Something is discovered by workers digging the Panama Canal. Something dormant. Sinister. Very much alive.

2009 - Project Samhain. A secret underground government installation begun 103 years ago in New Mexico. The best minds in the world have been recruited to study the most amazing discovery in the history of mankind. But the century of peaceful research is about to end.

BECAUSE IT JUST WOKE UP.

Book Description:

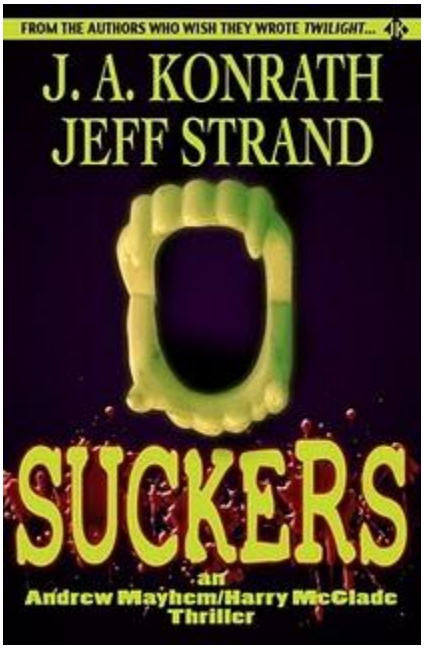
When linguist Andrew Dennison is yanked from his bed by the Secret Service and taken to a top secret facility in the desert , he has no idea he's been brought there to translate the words of an ancient demon.

He joins pretty but cold veterinarian Sun Jones, eccentric molecular biologist Dr. Frank Belgium, and a hodge-podge of religious, military, and science personnel to try and figure out if the creature is, indeed, Satan.

But things quickly go bad, and very soon Andy isn't just fighting for his life, but the lives of everyone on earth...

ORIGIN by J.A. Konrath
All hell is about the break loose. For real.

ORIGIN is approximately 76,000 words long.



Masters of the comedy thriller genre, J.A. Konrath and Jeff Strand, team up for the humorous horror novella Suckers.

Strand's perpetually unlucky character Andrew Mayhem, star of the novels Graverobbers Wanted (No Experience Necessary), Single White Psychopath Seeks Same, and Casket For Sale (Only Used Once), sets off on a simple mission at the request of his wife: Get some spaghetti sauce.

On his way to the store he meets Konrath's obnoxious private eye Harry McGlade, co-star of the Lt. Jack Daniels thrillers Whiskey Sour, Bloody Mary, Rusty Nail, Dirty Martini, Fuzzy Navel, and Cherry Bomb.

Horrific violence, bad jokes, and lots of name calling soon ensues. Some sex, too, but not between the main characters.

Originally, published as a very expensive limited-edition hardcover, Suckers is now available as a super cheap ebook.

But the fun doesn't stop there.

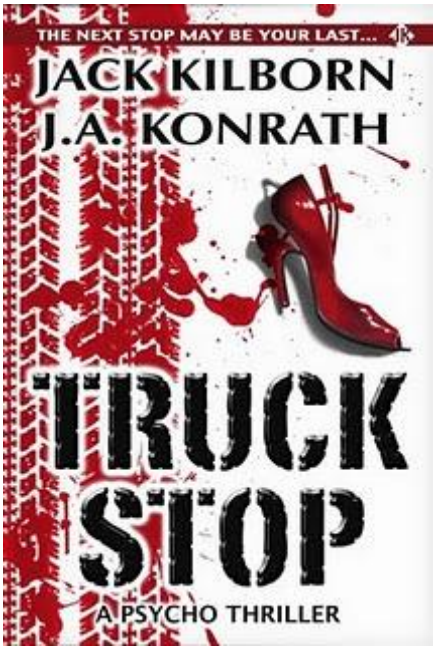
Also included in this ebook are six other Mayhem and McGlade stories, many of them rare and long out of print.

Whelp Wanted - JA Konrath
Poor Career Choice - Jeff Strand
Taken to the Cleaners - JA Konrath
A Bit of Halloween Mayhem - Jeff Strand
The Necro File - JA Konrath
The Lost (For a Good Reason) Adventure of Andrew Mayhem - Jeff Strand

If that's not enough to get you to part with your pocket change, this ebook also includes two brand new introductions written by the authors, and an exclusive Strand/Konrath interview.

That's over 53,000 words worth of demented entertainment, for half the price of a kiddie meal at that fast food restaurant with the scary clown. It's also 1/3 of the calories.

Warning: Some of the jokes (mostly Konrath's) push the boundaries of good taste. Don't buy this if you're easily offended.



Before the events of Jack Kilborn's epic horror novel AFRAID...

Before the events of J.A. Konrath's critically acclaimed thrillers FUZZY NAVEL and CHERRY BOMB...

Before the events of Jack Kilborn's and Blake Crouch's #1 Amazon Kindle bestseller SERIAL...

Three hunters of humans meet for the ultimate showdown at the TRUCK STOP.

Taylor is a recreational killer, with dozens of gristly murders under his belt. He pulls into a busy Wisconsin truck stop at midnight, trolling for the next to die.

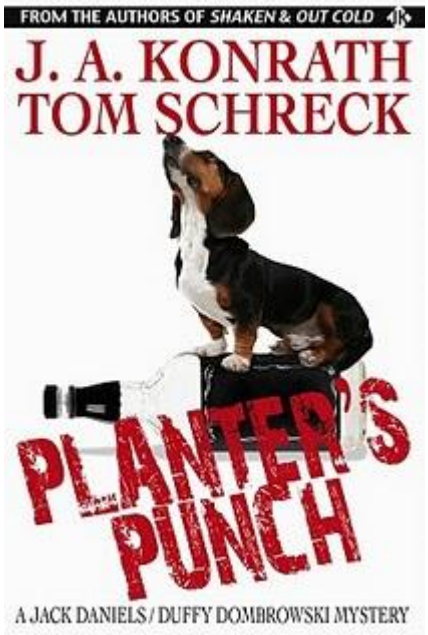
Chicago Homicide cop Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels is a long way from home, driving to meet her boyfriend for a well-earned vacation. She pulls into the truck stop for a quick cup of coffee and stumbles into her worst nightmare.

Jack's no stranger to dealing with psychos, but she's got her hands full trying to stop Taylor. Especially since he's getting help from someone just as deadly; a portly serial maniac named Donaldson...

TRUCK STOP is a 15,000 word thriller novella that ties together Konrath's and Kilborn's works, with terrifying results.

A prequel to SERIAL, which has been downloaded more than 70,000 times, TRUCK STOP is an eighteen-wheeled ride straight into hell. Not for the faint of heart. Let the reader beware.

This ebook also includes an exclusive interview: JA Konrath talks with Jack Kilborn, plus excerpts from their latest books, CHERRY BOMB and AFRAID.



JA Konrath is the author of the Lt. Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels mysteries, Whiskey Sour, Bloody Mary, Rusty Nail, Dirty Martini, Fuzzy Navel, and Cherry Bomb. Daniels is a Chicago homicide cop with a wicked sense of humor, and the novels fluctuate between funny business and serious suspense.

Tom Schreck is the author of the Duffy Dombrowski mysteries, On the Ropes, TKO, and Out Cold. Duffy is a social worker by day and a semi-pro boxer by night, and he's quick with a left hook as he is with his wit.

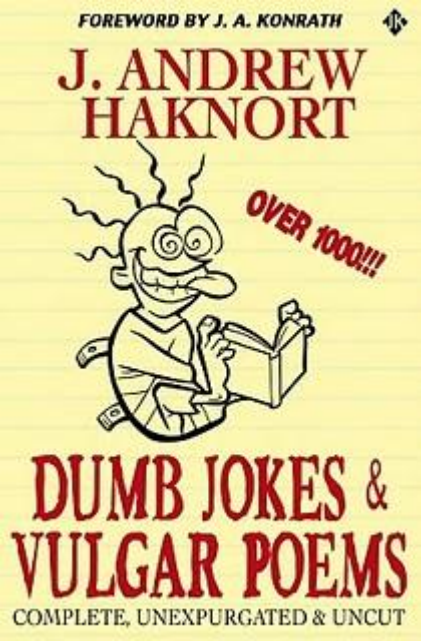
Planter's Punch is a collection of Jack Daniels and Duffy Dombrowski short stories. Plus Konrath and Schreck have included a cross-over short that features both of their lead characters.

This 56,000 word compilation features ten stories, an interview, and an excerpt from Konrath's seventh Jack Daniels novel, Shaken.

Contents include:

On the Rocks - JA Konrath
Duffy by Decision - Tom Schreck
Body Shots - JA Konrath
Duffy, Elvis and One Very Special Hound Dog - Tom Schreck
With a Twist - JA Konrath
The Duffy Vinci Code - Tom Schreck
Overproof - JA Konrath
Hounding Duffy - Tom Schreck
Shaken (excerpt) - JA Konrath
The Right Choice – Tom Schreck
Planter's Punch – JA Konrath & Tom Schreck
Tom Schreck Interviews JA Konrath

Both Schreck and Konrath write funny, laugh out-loud mysteries without skimping on the action and suspense.



This collection of more than one thousand raunchy jokes and funny poems, formatted especially for your Kindle, is easily the best pocket change you'll ever spend on anything, except for maybe some sort of medication that helps keep you alive.

Here are some examples of the over one thousand (did we mention there are over 1000?) gems included in this ebook:

WHY THE FLOOR IS WET
I pissed,
And I missed.

JEFF
No one likes,
My cousin Jeff,
He's a nice guy,
But has bad breff.

GRANDMA
My Grandma wears a diaper,
I really hate to wipe her.

I LOST MY SQUIRREL
I lost my squirrel!
I lost my squirrel!
It just fell off now I'm a girl!

FORTY DAYS AND FORTY NIGHTS
Why is it raining?
I don't Noah.

GIANT HOG
There is a giant hog,
Who lives in my garage,
But I never see him,
Because he uses hamoflage.

DOING TIME
Prison gave me acne,
So I broke out.

HUNGRY GUY
I ate the parrot,
And didn't share it.

THE PILL
Mary is on the pill,
But it plagues her with doubt,
Whenever she has sex,
The pill just falls right out.

Plus hundreds more bad poems, most of them too filthy to be printed here.

Besides the lousy poetry, this book contains hundreds of Haknort's thoughts and observations, including:

I wrote a book about menopause, but it is hard to understand because it doesn't have any periods.

When the old gypsy cursed me, I laughed in her face. I'm not laughing now, because when she saw me laugh she beat the crap out of me.

I was addicted to nicotine gum, chewing three packs a day. So in order to ween myself off, I started smoking.

Whenever I go fishing, I'm reminded of an old girlfriend. Her name was Annette. She also had a sister, named Smallmouth Bass.

I'll never forget what my grandfather used to say. I would sit on his lap and he would yell, "Fatty buttocks! Fatty Buttocks!" at the top of his lungs. I guess I never really understood my grandfather. My parents didn't, either. That's probably why they put him away.

Yes, believe it or not, there really is a blue six foot chicken named Pepé living in my bedroom closet. Either that or it's the drugs.

It's much easier to differentiate between a cabbage and a lettuce if you give them names, like Shelly or Jockmo.

Instead of "Mothers Day" how about "Sexy Virgins Day?" It can be nine months earlier.

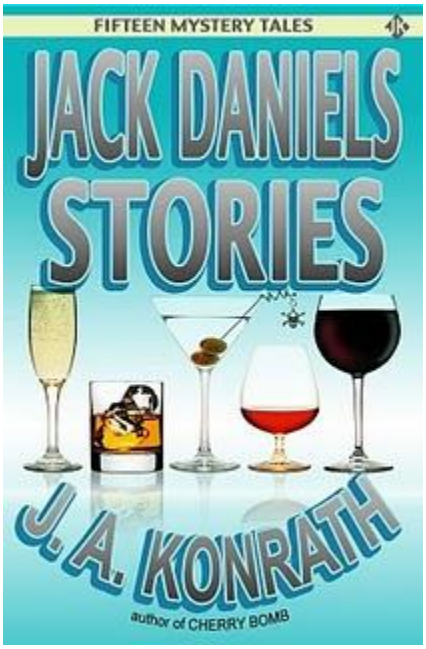
I never claimed to be a genius. Well, except on that billboard I rented.

I remember Mom's signature dish. She called it Pork Surprise. It was just a big bowl of dirt with some clumps of weeds in it. When we asked where the pork was, she'd yell: "There's no pork... surprise!"

It's not fun watching a grown man cry. Unless you have a comfy chair to sit in, and maybe some snacks.

And many, many, so many more. Boy, there are lots more. Lots. Too many, in fact.

So get yours today, before we jack the price up to $9.99 like all the other ebooks on Amazon. Hurry! Do it now!



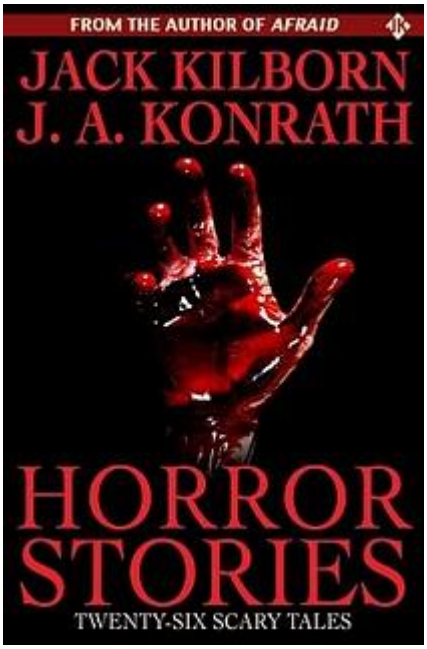
JA Konrath, known for the Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels thrillers set in Chicago, offers this collection of short stories and novellas from the Jack Daniels universe.

Join Jack Daniels, her partner Herb Benedict, private eye Harry McGlade, and part-time criminal Phineas Troutt, in this omnibus of 15 stories.

These were previous published in magazines and anthologies, and many are long out of print.

On the Rocks - Suicide or murder? Lt. Jack Daniels solves a locked room mystery.
Whelp Wanted - P.I. Harry McGlade becomes a dognapper in order to stop a dognapper, or something like that.
Street Music - Phineas Troutt hunts a prostitute through the dangerous streets of Chicago. Are his intentions pure?
The One That Got Away - The Gingerbread Man (the villain from WHISKEY SOUR) hunts one final victim.
With a Twist - It looked like the man fell from a great height, but the body is in his living room. Jack Daniels solves another impossible crime.
Epitaph - Phin Troutt takes on a Chicago street gang with vengeance on his mind.
Taken to the Cleaners - Harry McGlade tries to solve a difficult mystery, but mostly just goofs off.
Body Shots - Jack Daniels faces her most challenging case yet; a school shooting. But does she know more about the perp than she realizes?
Suffer - Phineas Troutt has taken some questionable jobs, but will he murder a man's wife?
School Daze - P.I. Harry McGlade investigates a private school, but he's not entirely sure why.
Overproof - While shopping on the Gold Coast, Jack Daniels notices traffic has come to a stand-still. When she realizes what the problem is, she's confronted with her own mortality, and the possible deaths of hundreds.
Bereavement - How badly does Phineas Troutt need a fix? What is he willing to do?
Pot Shot - Detective Herb Benedict just wants a home cooked meal. But his plans get interrupted by a very determined sniper.
Last Request - Phineas Troutt picks up a hitchhiker, with deadly results.
The Necro File - Harry McGlade investigates some bizarre murders in this hilarious, gore-filled mini-epic. (Author's note: This is easily the funniest thing I've ever written, but it's also very offensive. Let the reader beware...)

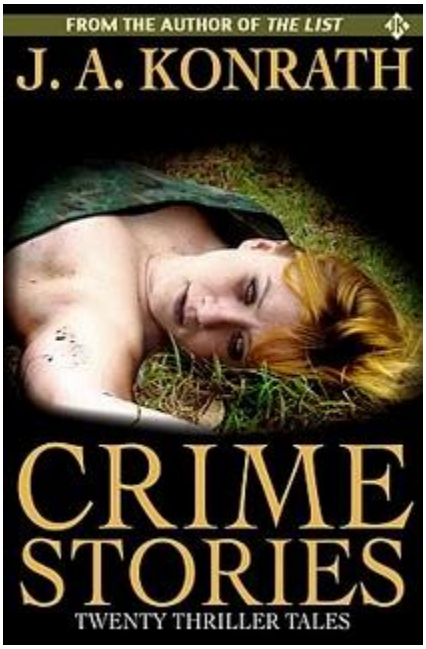
That's about 65,000 words of Jack Daniels and friends.



This collection by J.A. Konrath (aka Jack Kilborn) features scary, gruesome, and even a few funny horror tales, most of them previously published in various magazines and anthologies. Stories include:

Finicky Eater - It's after a nuclear war, and a mother and her son are in a fallout shelter, the food long long...
The Screaming - Van Helsing and vampires, in 1960s England.
Mr. Pull Ups - A body modification tale taken to the extreme.
The Shed - Two burglars find the door to hell.
Them's Good Eats - Rednecks vs. aliens, on a spaceship ride of horrors.
First Time - A coming of age tale where all may not be what it appears.
Forgiveness - A dying serial killer asks for a priest to hear his last confession.
Redux - Ghost story noir, about a private eye and a deadly haunting.
The Bag - What's in the bag? You really don't want to know...
Careful, He Bites - Lycanthrope flash fiction.
Symbios - A sci-fi novella about man's first encounter with alien life, and how things can quickly turn bad.
A Matter of Taste - Zombie flash fiction.
Embrace - A bit of gothic horror.
Trailer Sucks - Some trailer park jerks kidnap a vampire.
Markey - Flash fiction, from a twisted point of view.
Punishment Room - A horrific suspense tale about a not-so-distant future.
The Confession - Terrible crimes, told entirely in dialog.
Basketcase - Hardboiled noir with a horrific twist.
The Agreement - A gambler pays the ultimate price to get out of a debt.
Well Balanced Meal - The worst restaurant you've ever been in.
S.A. - A werewolf novella about a Shapshifters Anonymous group that must battle Santa Claus.
Dear Diary - A very twisted pom pon girl reveals the secret of her inner strength.
Mr. Spaceman - We've come to mate with earth women.
Appalachian Lullaby - What do you do with a radioactive monkey?
Treatment - A troubled boy talks to a psychiatrist, but are either what they seem?
A Sound of Blunder - A parody of Bradbury's Sound of Thunder, co-written with F. Paul Wilson.

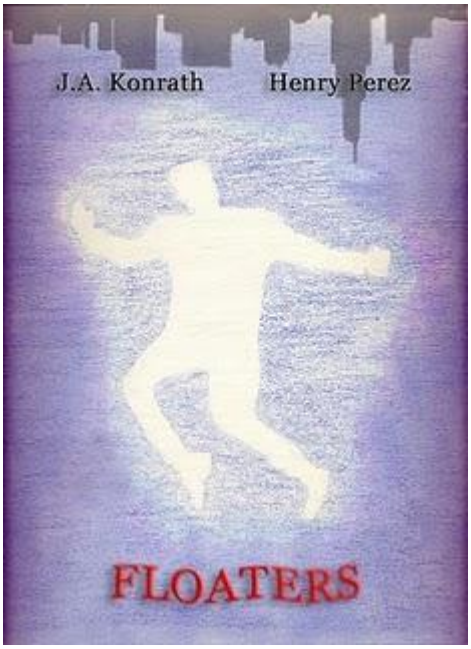
That's over 70,000 words of horror, for less than the price of a coffee. If you liked AFRAID by Jack Kilborn, or the dark parts of Konrath's Jack Daniels series, this ebook is right up your alley.



Twenty crime and mystery stories, some of them series, some funny, some real puzzlers. Most of these were previously published in various anthologies and magazines.

If you're a fan of Konrath's Jack Daniels series, it's worth checking out. Contents include:

The Big Guys - Flash fiction, winner of the Derringer Award
A Fistful of Cozy - A satire of the mystery cozy genre.
Cleansing - An ancient crime of biblical proportions
Lying Eyes - Solve it yourself, given the clues.
Perfect Plan - Another solve it yourself. Don't you remember One Minute Mysteries and Encyclopedia Brown?
Piece of Cake - Another solve it yourself, originally featured in Woman's World.
Animal Attraction - Solve it yourself.
Urgent Reply Needed - A cautionary tale about dealing with spammers.
Blaine's Deal - A parody of hardboiled noir.
Light Drizzle - A light-hearted send-up of hitman stories.
An Archaeologist's Story - How digging up old bones leads to fresh corpses.
Don't Press That Button! - An essay about the gadgets in the James Bond universe, and which you need to buy.
Piranha Pool - A writer seeking criticism pays the ultimate price.
A Newbie's Guide to Thrillerfest - Never been to a mystery conference? Here's the in-depth dirt.
Inspector Oxnard - He's either brilliant, or too stupid to breathe.
One Night Only - A sports fan ends up in jail, all for the love of the game.
Could Stephanie Plum Car Really Get Car Insurance? - An essay about Janet Evanovich's famous character.
Cozy or Hardboiled? - Take the test to find out which type of book you're reading.
Addiction - What's the worst drug you can get hung up on?
Weigh To Go - A humor column about health clubs.

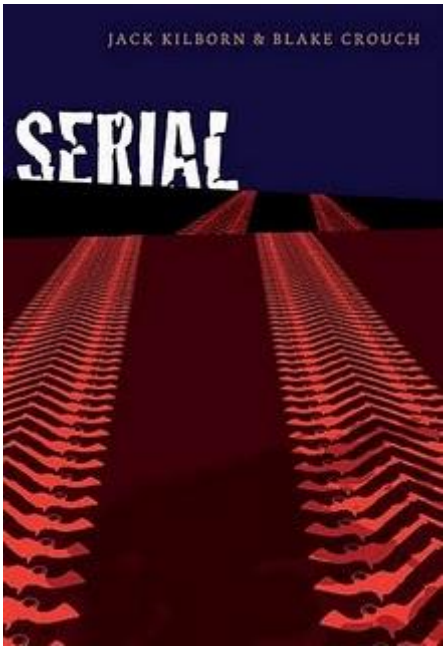


When the latest in a series of dead bodies turns up in the Chicago River, newspaper reporter Alex Chapa and Police Lieutenant Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels reluctantly join forces.

Thriller writers J.A. Konrath (Whiskey Sour, Fuzzy Navel, Cherry Bomb) and Henry Perez (Killing Red) and their series characters have teamed up to create FLOATERS, a mystery tale that combines humor with thrills.

Included in this 30,000 word collection are J.A. Konrath's LAST REQUEST, a Phineas Trout story, and FAMILIAR PLACES, a story by Henry Perez about hit man who has seen better days.

This collection also includes a conversation between the authors and excerpts from each of their new novels, CHERRY BOMB, by J.A. Konrath, and KILLING RED by Henry Perez.



Remember the twin golden rules of hitchhiking?

1: Don't go hitchhiking, because the driver who picks you up could be certifiably crazy.

2: Don't pick up hitchhikers, because the traveler you pick up could be a raving nutcase.

So what if, on some dark, isolated road, Crazy #1 offered a ride to Nutcase #2?

When Blake Crouch (DESERT PLACES, ABANDONED) and Jack Kilborn (AFRAID, TRAPPED), face off, the result is SERIAL, a terrifying tale of hitchhiking gone terribly wrong. Like a deeply twisted version of an "After School Special," SERIAL is the single most persuasive public service announcement on the hazards of free car rides.

Beyond a thrilling piece of horrifying suspense, SERIAL is also a groundbreaking experiment in literary collaboration. Kilborn wrote the first part. Crouch wrote the second. And they wrote the third together over email in 100-word exchanges, not aware of each other's opening section. All bets were off, and may the best psychopath win.

F. Paul Wilson says, "SERIAL reads just like a Crouch or Kilborn novel: Full speed ahead, no flinching, no blinking, no brakes."

SERIAL contains the 7500 word novella, SERIAL, a Q&A with Kilborn and Crouch, author bibliographies, and excerpts from their most recent and forthcoming works: Kilborn's AFRAID and Crouch's ABANDON.

And finally, a note/disclaimer from the authors:

SERIAL is a horror novella written by two of the most twisted minds in the world of horror fiction.

But just because it is 100% free doesn't mean you should automatically download it.

This is disturbing stuff. Perhaps too disturbing.

If you can handle horrific thrills, proceed at your own risk.

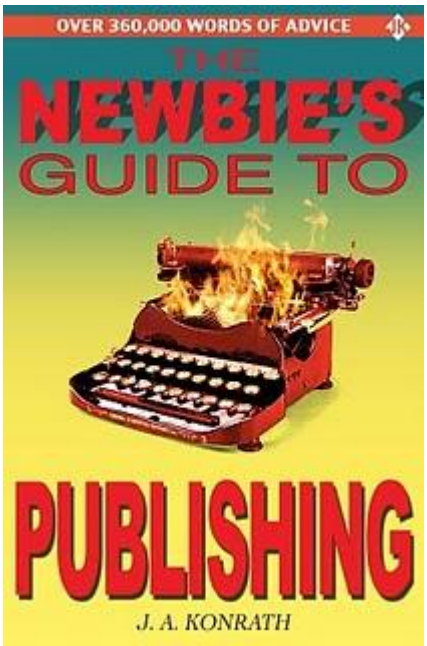
But if you suffer from anxiety attacks, nervous disorders, insomnia, nightmares or night terrors, heart palpitations, stomach problems, or are of an overly sensitive nature, you should read something else instead.

The authors are in no way responsible for any lost sleep, missed work, failed relationships, or difficulty in coping with life after you have read SERIAL. They will not pay for any therapy you may require as a result of reading SERIAL. They will not cradle you in their arms, rock you back and forth, and speak in soothing tones while you unsuccessfully try to forget SERIAL.

Yes, it's free. But free has its price.

You have been warned.

# # #



So there you have it. Pictures and descriptions for my Kindle books. Five of them are currently ranked in the top 1000 Kindle bestsellers. The majority of the rest are in the top 5000. Not bad when competing against huge bestselling authors and 420,000 other ebooks currently available on Kindle.

Can you duplicate these results? Some already have. There are authors with less name-recognition than I have, who are equal to or beating my sales. It shouldn't be a surprise that they all seem to be doing many of the things I've mentioned above.

The ebook world in general, and the Kindle in particular, has leveled the playing field for self-published authors.

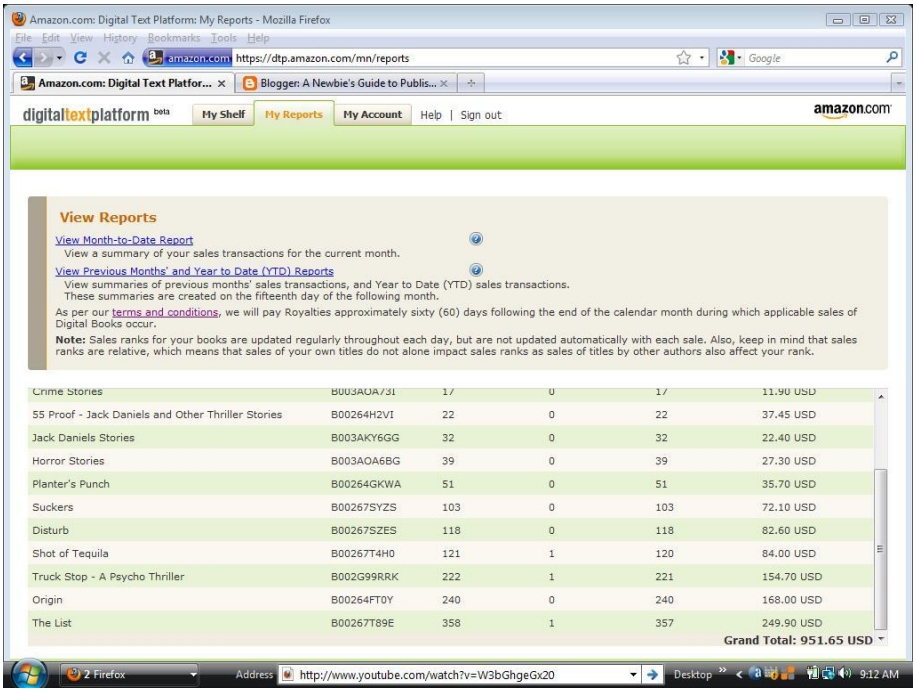
It's going to be an interesting year. If you're a writer, you can watch from the sidelines, waiting for the publishing industry to get a clue. Or you can carve a niche now, before everyone jumps on the bandwagon and it gets much harder to succeed.

Oh, and I almost forgot. I have another ebook coming soon to Kindle. An ebook that hundreds of people have been asking me about for years. One that contains almost 400,000 words of publishing tips from yours truly, all organized by section and fully searchable, updated to include all of my blog posts about ebooks.

Can I get a hell yeah? :) 39 comments

Whoa There, Ebook Writer

If you've been reading my blog lately, you know I've sold over 30,000 self-published ebooks on Kindle. Today it's 9:15am on March 8, and I've already sold 1322 ebooks this month.



I've gone from paying my mortgage every month on Kindle ebooks, to paying almost all of my monthly bills.

Numbers don't lie. But numbers also mean very little until significance is attached to them. It's easy to misinterpret my numbers and draw hasty conclusions.

Let's look at some truths, followed by some misconceptions.

1. **More people are buying ereaders and ebooks.** And the number will keep going up and up. This is true. While no one knows if ereaders will ever reach the same saturation as iPod or BluRay, it's safe to assume that as time goes on, ereaders will become better, cheaper, and more adopted by the general public.

2. **Cheaper books sell better than expensive books.** I'm frankly shocked not a single big publisher has released an ebook for $2.99. Value isn't about list price and royalty percentage. The true value of a book should be how much it earns in royalties. And selling 10,000 copies of a $1.99 book earns more than selling 1500 copies of a $9.99 book.

3. **Ebooks make it easier for writers to reach readers.** This is very true. Agents and editors —once gatekeepers, blessing the few with publication and snubbing the masses as inferior —are no longer as relevant as they once were, and unless they adapt, their relevance will continue to diminish.

4. **Joe Konrath is doing well selling ebooks.** And he's going to do even better as time goes on.

So far, everything I've said is true and hard to argue against. But if the amount of emails I've been getting lately is any indicator, many writers are drawing on these four facts and tailoring them to fit their individual dreams.

1. **Writers no longer need an agent.** Easy there, Smokey. I never said that. I never even hinted at that. Right now, in March of 2010, agents are essential if you want to be a full time fiction writer. Yes, they shop manuscripts to publishers, but they also do a lot more than that. First and foremost, they do have a pretty

good instinct for vetting manuscripts, and separating the wheat from the chaff. If your manuscript isn't good enough to land an agent, how can you be sure it's good enough to be a successful self-published ebook?

2. **Writers no longer need publishers.** Right now I've got 12 ebooks and story collections on Kindle, and by the end of the year I'll make over $40k. But I made over $40k on Whiskey Sour, my first novel, by signing with a large publisher. Print is still the way to make the most money and reach the most readers. I don't see that going away anytime soon.

3. **Print publishing is impossible to break into, so don't even bother.** Wrong. You should try. You should try very hard. There is no reward in success without failure coming first. Sending out queries and getting rejections are more than rites of passage. They're learning experiences. And for fiction writers, I believe they're essential learning experiences to have.

4. **I can sell a lot of ebooks like Joe Konrath.** That's the seductive thing about numbers. You look at them and think, "I can do that too." Well, maybe you can. But chances are, you can't. No offense meant. You might be a better writer than I am. You might be a better marketer. But I'm pretty lucky to have these numbers. I also have a pretty solid platform I've built up over the last eight years.

Here's my advice: Keep aiming high.

As a fiction writer, your goal should be to find a great agent who can sell your book to a great publisher.

If you can't find an agent, perhaps you should rewrite the manuscript. Or begin working on the next one.

If you find an agent, but can't find a publisher, you can consider self-publishing on Kindle. But keep in mind all that entails. You'll have to edit, format, find cover art, learn simple HTML to upload your file, write a cover description, and then get the word out, all with no guarantee you'll sell more than a few dozen copies a month. Also, many editors will consider a book self-published on Kindle to already be published, and they only want first rights. By leaping immediately to Kindle, you might be forgoing a print deal later on.

Q: I've got a book I know is great, but I could never find an agent. Should I self-publish on Kindle?

A: If it's your first book, I'd say no. Sit on it for a few months and write a second book. First books are never as good as we think they are, and self-publishing a book that isn't your best can hurt your career.

Q: I have a bunch of short stories. Should I self-publish those on Kindle?

A: If you've already sold them, yes. If they're stories you never even tried to submit to magazines or anthologies, I'd try to submit to magazines and anthologies. If they've been rejected a bunch of times, maybe there's a reason for that.

Q: I wrote a novella. There are no markets for novellas. Should I self-publish on Kindle?

A: Has the novella been workshopped with a writers group? Has it been written, rewritten, rewritten, edited, and polished? Then my answer is; maybe. Though you should consider making it book length, or trimming it to short story length, and pursuing print either way.

Q: You've always touted self-publishing, Joe. Why are you changing your opinion?

A: I've never advocated self-publishing. I've advocated ebooks. And I think traditional publishers are missing the boat on ebooks, so I'm doing it myself. But I didn't become a writer so I could spend my time formatting, working with cover artists, uploading constant corrections, fiddling with product descriptions, and pimping myself on message boards. I became a writer to write. I'd much rather just write the books, and leave everything else to a savvy publisher.

In other words, writing is a job. Self-publishing your writing is two jobs. I'd rather just have one job.

Q: Now that Kindle is adopting the agency model with a 70% royalty, and Apple is opening an iBook store, shouldn't I get in on this now before the market is flooded with shit?

A: Maybe. If you have an out of print backlist. If you have an agent with books she hasn't been able to sell. If you're a published author with some shelf novels. Then yes, you should get on Kindle and iPad and Nook and Sony and everyplace else that comes up.

But if you're a newbie author who hasn't even finished your first novel yet and is already designing the cover art, perhaps you need to slow down a bit.

I'm not out to crush anyone's dreams here. But writing a good book is hard to do, and not everyone can do it. There's a learning curve. We're all eager to get read. We all want to get published. But before you let the hard-to-please masses read your work, you really have to make sure it's good enough. Readers don't care about you, or your dreams, or how hard you worked on a book. They want to be entertained. Period. If they buy your book and don't like it, they'll let you and others know.

You wouldn't buy your first saxaphone, practice for a month, then go audition for the Boston Pops. You'd spend a long time practicing and learning before you were good enough.

On one hand, authors being able to instantly reach readers without any gatekeepers is a fabulous thing.

On the other hand, too many authors may jump into this too quickly, without mastering their storytelling skills.

I know this for a fact. I've judged self-published book contests. It was awful.

If you really want my ebook sales, here's the only path I know to duplicate them.

1. Write 9 unpublished novels and get over 500 rejections.

2. Sign a six figure print deal.

3. Mail out 7000 letters to libraries, visit 1200 bookstores, and travel to 39 states speaking at writing conferences, conventions, and book fairs.

4. Write a blog that gets half a million hits per year.

5. Sign six more book deals.

6. Get one of your big print publishers to release an ebook for free.

7. Study the market so hard your spouse thinks you're crazy, then take your early rejected books, make sure they're perfect, and upload them to Kindle along with several short story collections and collaborations.

8. Cross your fingers.

That's the journey I took to get here. Your journey will be different. But no matter your path to success, I urge you not to cut corners. There is no shortcut to selling a lot of books, because books sell one at a time. Learn your craft, learn the business, work hard, try your best. That's the secret.

Now if you'll excuse me, I have some writing to do...

184 comments

The Value of Ebooks

Let's define the term "value" as "a fair equivalent in money for something sold."

Let's define "devalue" as "to lessen the worth off something sold."

So does a $1.99 price point for ebooks constitute their value? Or does that price devalue the work?

In a capitalist economy, under the rules of supply and demand, things cost money to produce, and their price is dictated by how many things are produced and how many people want to buy them.

An item usually costs a determined amount to create (which tends to go down as more items are produced), and then wholesalers and retailers sell this item for what the market will bear, trying to make a profit.

A few years ago, when the Nintendo Wii was a hot item and hard to find, people who were able to get Wiis sold them on eBay for more than double the $199 list price. The Wii's value was higher, because demand was higher.

Now you can buy used Wii's for less than $100. There is a big enough supply for everyone, so the price comes down.

So how do ebooks fit into this?

For the moment, let's ignore the hard work the author has put into writing the book.

To bring an ebook to market, a book needs to be edited, proofread, put into a proper layout and format, and given cover art and a product description.

These costs can fluctuate. But they are one-time costs.

Once an ebook is created, it can be reproduced indefinitely for free. There are no printing costs or shipping costs. Distributing ebooks to readers costs about 5 cents per download.

The retailer selling the ebook (Amazon, Sony, B&N, Apple) takes a percentage of the cost of an ebook. It looks like all of the retailers are adopting the agency model, which means they no longer can set the price of the books they sell, and they keep 30% of whatever that price is.

That leaves 70% of an ebook's price to be split between the publisher and the author. This split depends on what the contract says, but currently the going rate is 25% of the wholesale price to the author, 75% to the publisher.

Publishers seem pretty sure that the value of an ebook is $9.99 or above. It makes no difference that they no longer have to pay for shipping or printing or warehousing, or that their huge advertising and marketing departments won't be needed nearly as much for ebooks, and the sales department won't be needed at all. They want ebooks to be priced comparable to trade paperbacks, at least during their initial release.

One of the things I've heard several publishers mention is that they want to be able to establish the *value* of their ebooks. And that low-priced ebooks are *devaluing* their true worth.

When I hear this, my bullshit meter peaks.

Aside from some minimal set-up costs, ebooks cost next to nothing to produce or distribute. They have no inherent value, except in the entertainment value of the words.

In the past, publishers have determined the value of those words at around $25 for a hardcover new release. They determined this because of all the people who needed to get paid in order to bring the book to the consumer. Besides the printer and the shipper, the distributor got a cut, the bookstore got a cut, the author got a cut, and there were other costs like corrugation, advertising, and marketing to go along with the cover art, layout, and editing. So the author made $3.00 on a hardcover, and everyone else got a piece of the pie, and customers who wanted the book had to pay that $25.

But a lot of these costs get eliminated with ebooks. Yet publishers continue to insist that consumers are willing to pay print prices for intangible objects loaded with DRM and linked to a proprietary format.

Well, yeah, because publishers need to meet the same overhead that they're currently struggling to meet with print. They look at what they need to survive, and they have determined they can't sell ebooks for less than $9.99, even though common sense says they could downsize, reorganize, and probably do so.

What publishers aren't taking into account here are the consumers.

Naturally, people would rather pay less for something than more. And in a digital world, like we're rapidly becoming, consumers have shown consistently in other forms of media that they place less value on downloads than on physical products.

When companies price digital content too high, consumers respond by pirating that content. That's the ultimate in "devaluing."

So what is truly the value of ebooks? Is it free? Or is it the publisher's price, which seems inflated, and which in the agency model gives them 52.5% of the list price of an ebook for doing nothing more than providing a cover, editing, and putting it up on Amazon?

If an ebook is free, the author gets screwed.

If an ebook is priced high, it won't sell a lot of copies, and the author gets screwed.

If an ebook sells for a small amount of money, the author makes 17.5% of the list price. That also seems like the author is getting screwed.

Publishers are currently talking about going 50/50 with authors, so an author will make 35% of the list price. But it's still the price the publisher sets, which is inflated, which will lead to piracy.

By setting the price, the publisher is pricing ebooks so they won't sell well, and then taking 35% of what little money will come in.

I can write a novel pretty fast. But I'm betting I spend more time writing the book than my publisher spends making cover art, editing it, and uploading it. This is a fair 50/50 split?

In the past, authors needed publishers in order to get their books to readers. Authors needed the publisher's connections with bookstores and distributors. They needed the publisher to print and ship the books. They needed the publisher's marketing and advertising departments to make sure those books sold.

In an ebook future, authors don't need all of that. They need editors, cover artists, and someone to upload the book. And they shouldn't have to give up half of their money for those simple services.

But let's get back to *value*, and what ebooks are truly worth.

Supply and demand doesn't apply in a system where the supply is infinite. But consumers still vote with their dollars. And they prefer to spend less rather than more.

How does this work out for the author?

As of right now, my ebook **The List** has sold 10970 copies on Amazon at $1.99 each. I currently make 70 cents per download. That means this book has earned me $7679.

Compare that to my ebook **Fuzzy Navel**, controlled by my publisher, Hyperion. This book currently sells for $7.19 on Amazon (they're losing money on each book sold) and I earn $2.25 per book. As of my last royalty statement, Fuzzy Navel has sold 273 copies, earning me $613.

According to publishers, the $7.19 is still devaluing the ebook, which should be higher. $1.99 is certainly devaluing the book, and publishers believe they'll go out of business selling for so low.

And yet, I made $7000 more, and sold 40 times as many copies, selling for the lower price.

So what is the true value of ebooks?

Recently, publishers have forced Amazon to adopt the agency model. That means the above numbers will change dramatically once this new model kicks in.

How dramatically?

I'll be forced to change the price on The List, going from $1.99 to $2.99, to get the 70% royalty rate. I don't know if it will sell as well at the higher price, but let's say it does. That means 10970 ebooks sold will earn me $21,172.

Since publishers are now controlling the price, let's say Hyperion raises the price of Fuzzy Navel to $9.99. I don't know if it will sell as well at the higher price, but let's say it does. That means 273 ebooks sold will earn me $477.75.

Hey! Wait a second! The price went up, and I'm earning less?

It gets worse. I fear that if they raise the price to $9.99, fewer people will buy it. $2.99 is still an impulse purchase. $9.99 is a lot of money for a download.

But maybe Hyperion will get smart, and actually drop the price to something reasonable. Say $2.99.

Let's say at $2.99 I sell 40 times the copies I'm currently selling, as with The List. That means I'd make $5740.

That seems better. Not as much as the $21k I'd make if I self-published it using the agency model, but a helluva jump up from the $613 I made selling for $7.19.

So I ask you. What is the true value of ebooks? Is it $9.99 and up? Or is it $2.99 and down?

Seems obvious to me. But I'm not in charge of a large publishing company trying to sell paper, which is apparently more important to them than embracing the future by figuring out what I already have:

The value of an ebook is determined by the overall amount of money it earns, not the list price.

Let's see if publishers can figure that out.

79 comments

Status Quo Vadis?

Or, in English: Where are the old ways going?

I've spent a few weeks helping my friend, Robert Walker, format and upload his books to Kindle.

Incredibly, Rob has forty novels that are out of print. These aren't self-pubbed novels, or small press novels. These are books that were with big houses, which had big print runs and distribution. Some of these books go for big money on the used book circuit.

By the end of this month, thirty of Rob's books will be available on the Kindle, for $1.99 each. I predict he'll do quite well with them. After all, he managed to sell millions of copies when they were in print.

Which begs two questions.

1. Why did they ever go out of print in the first place?

2. Why am I, his friend, uploading these books to Kindle, rather than a publisher?

Part one is pretty easy to answer. More than 95% of everything ever published has gone out of print. Times change. Publishers fold. Bookstores need to move X number of copies per quarter in order to keep books on the shelf, and distributors charge rent for books just sitting there. So if a book isn't paying for itself in real estate, it goes out of print.

But Out-Of-Print does not equal Worthless. There is still money to be made on old books. That's why there's a billion dollar used book industry.

However, used books still involves storing, shelving, and shipping paper. It's the same industry, just at a discounted cut for all involved (and zero cut for the author.)

Which brings us to the second question. Why isn't anyone mining this rich vein?

Previous attempts to grab the out-of-print gold have met with disaster. Google is still in court over its Search Inside the Book program. Amazon first allowed all public domain books to be uploaded to Kindle, then did an about-face on the practice. Big publishers have tried to retroactively grab ebook rights, and are now attempting to add clauses to old contracts, offering a paltry 25% royalty rate.

But I don't see any well-funded, large, coordinated effort to scoop up the rights to out of print material and make it available again. Everyone is so worried about the erights of present and future books (and erroneously pricing those erights at more than consumers want to pay) but no one is taking a used bookseller/antique dealer/eBay stance on all of this material that's just ready to be exploited.

Smart authors are doing it themselves. Among my peers, I've seen Raymond Benson, Lee Goldberg, Libby Fischer Hellmann, Scott Nicholson, F. Paul Wilson, and several others make their older books available on Kindle. But these are a small fraction of the writers I know with out of print work.

What's the hold up?

I think it's a combination of things.

1. Writers are used to the publishing end of things being done for them.

2. Writers are scared if they publish their own ebooks, no one will want to republish them in print (even though that rarely happens these days.)

3. Writers don't believe they can actually make money off of the stuff that's "failed."

My advice to writers: Wake the hell up.

Ebooks are not only here to stay, they're only going to grow in popularity. And an ebook is forever. Your $50 a month now may be $10,000 a year in 2016. You have to an opportunity to make money for eternity on these rights, and eternity is a long time.

But the opportunity won't last forever. Because someone is going to get wise, look at your backlist, and see dollar signs. They're going bribe you to get a piece of eternity, for doing nothing more than providing a cover and an uploading service.

I urge all writers to look at their backlist, and figure out how they can turn those dead tree books into ebooks. This should become a required skill for writers, like understanding narrative structure, or how to write a query letter.

If you're techno-stupid, shop around for a reasonable one-time fee to get your ebooks up and running. If you sign a contract with a e-publisher, make sure the lion's share of the profits are going to you, you have control over the list price, and the contract lasts for a finite amount of time.

Eternity is a long time to share royalties on books that you wrote.

Remember that. Before someone figures out how to screw you out of it. And I'm sure that will happen, very soon. Companies with deep pockets will offer to get your books on Kindle, and the fine print will screw you.

If I were an unscrupulous publisher with a big budget, that's where I'd be putting my money. I'd be approaching name authors with long backlists who don't know any better, offering them pennies on the dollar for what their life's work is worth.

The best defense against this is twofold: education, and hard work.

If you have out of print books, get them on Kindle yourself. If you need help, pay a flat fee for it.

If you do sign a publishing contract for your ebooks, make damn sure it is highly in your favor, and it has an expiration date.

For the first time in the history of publishing, writers have the upper hand.

Don't piss that advantage away by thinking that this is still 1995.

18 comments

Am I Good Enough to Epublish?

Based on comments and emails, a lot of writers are using me as motivation to self-publish ebooks.

I've tried to be clear that the only writing you should sell on Kindle is good writing, and it's very hard to judge if your own writing is good. Which is why I recommend you only epublish works that were published before (short stories, out of print novels) and works your agent tried to sell but couldn't (a good agent actively trying to sell you is usually proof your work is worthy.)

But those of you paying attention will notice that I have a few things up on Kindle that I wrote specifically for Kindle. My agent didn't rep them, and they were never previously published.

Hypocrisy?

Well, sort of. :)

When I offer works like SERIAL UNCUT, PLANTER'S PUNCH, and TRUCK STOP, which were written without any apparent vetting by professionals, I'm not completely bypassing traditional publishing channels. While I do believe ebooks are the future (and have the proof to back this up: it's 8am on March 24 and I've already sold 4300 ebooks this month) I also believe it's foolish to put anything up on Kindle unless you're 100% sure it is good enough.

In my case, everything I write is read by several of my peers. My peers are all professional writers —people who have agents and have sold books to big houses. If there is something wrong with the writing —and even though I've now written over 2 million words, I do still make mistakes —my friends point it out and I fix it before it goes live.

But what if you don't have a cadre of pros to vet your work? What if you're unpublished, unagented, and none of your peers are published writers?

My advice stands. Before you begin putting your work on Kindle, get an agent and sell some writing. I know it's hard. That's what makes it worthwhile.

Agents do much more than simply pair you with publishers and negotiate terms. And even if you're selling as many ebooks as I am, that pales next to what a big house can do for your book.

However...

I've seen the ebook world accelerate in the last 12 months, and traditional print publishing seems to be slowing down. Agents and editors are becoming pickier. Personally, I'm faced with some choices in my own career where I'm thinking about passing up print contracts that don't allow me to keep my erights.

I can predict a future where writers can, and should, make money without needing major print publishers. (I still believe agents are essential —for example, mine just negotiated a film option for SERIAL, is working to change terms in one of my contracts, is negotiating terms for another contract, has sold foreign rights, and has renewed my film option for AFRAID, all within the last four weeks.)

But I don't see agents as necessary in the ebook world, at least not yet. And I see print publishers as pretty much clueless when it comes to ebooks, for many of the reasons I've mentioned inprevious blog posts. (If you're interested in epublishing, follow those links and read those entries.)

So what should newbie writers do? Stay the course, find an agent, and try to sell a print book in a difficult market? Or upload their stuff to Kindle without professional vetting?

If you're thinking of uploading to Kindle, and you don't have an agent or any publishing credits, here are some things to ask yourself.

1. Do I Understand Story Structure? Long ago I figured out the essential elements to a narrative. You can download my Newbie'sGuide for details, but in a nutshell they are: Hook, Conflict, Dynamic Characters, Setting, Mood, Pace, Style, Resolution, and Spelling/Grammar. Unless you can speak at length what each of these do for a story, and know how to effectively use them, you probably aren't a good storyteller.

2. What Do I Want? If it's to make a living, get your work in bookstores, or have a wide fanbase, you want to get an agent. If you're content with making grocery money, getting a few fans, and not pursuing this as a career, then by all means ignore traditional publishing. Your goals should dictate your actions. And, as always, your goals should be within your capacity.

3. Can I Get Critiques? No matter your level of experience, you need other eyes on your work in order to vet it. Join a writing group. Befriend your peers. Use my crit sheet to give to friends and family (even non-writers) so they can critique you with a level of expertise. You can't do this in a vacuum. Even if you self-publish, you must have quality feedback.

4. Are There Downsides? Yes, there are, for either choice. Traditional publishing downsides include: publishers ill-equipped to handle the oncoming ebook boom, waiting a long time for the "yes" or "no", and relinquishing control of many aspects of your career. The downsides for epublishing yourself include: potentially alienating print publishers who want first rights (though that could swing the other way if you're a success), less money, less name-recognition, smaller fanbase and fewer readers, and putting out an inferior product, which can hurt your career.

5. Should I Do It Alone? A while ago, I postulated thatestributors would arise —people who would be middlemen between the author and the etailer (such as Amazon.) For those writers who don't want to mess with cover art, formatting and uploading, or keeping track of numbers, there are people who will help you get your book Kindle-ready. As always, look at the terms of the contract. Do you want to give a percentage to someone forever for doing something you could pay a flat fee for? Or is it worth a percentage to not have to worry about all of that stuff? And what percentage is fair?

6. What Do I Expect? Goals are within your control to reach. Expectations, however, are akin to dreams and beyond your control. I've been pretty successful at epublishing, but I'm still not sure why some of my ebooks sell better than others. My expectations going into this venture were very low, and yours should be as well.

Conclusions? Only you can decide what is right for you. But THERE ARE NO SHORTCUTS. Writing is a craft that must be learned. Just because it's easier to reach readers with epublishingdoesn't mean you should forsake finding an agent. Like everything in life, there's a learning curve, and jumping in blindly is stupid.

I epublish things that are out of print, things my agent couldn't sell, and things my peers have vetted that I'm pretty sure I can make money on based on my ebook experiences.

If you have something out of print, epublish it.

If you have something your agent can't sell, epublish it.

If you have a fanbase who wants it, epublish it.

If you've exhausted all agent and print possibilities (meaning you've gotten a lot of rejections), don't epublish until it has been vetted and you have clear goals and expectations.

If you've never even tried to get an agent or publish it traditionally, think twice, then think again, before epublishing. It's tempting to get the instant gratification, but there is probably a reason you couldn't find an agent, and that reason is probably: the work isn't good enough yet.

Are there exceptions? Sure. There are always exceptions. And in my experience, every newbie writer thinks they're the exception.

But I urge you, before you self publish, to understand your reasons for doing so. You always have a choice.

The publishing industry is pretty moronic, and it makes a lot of mistakes. But before you think you're smarter than the industry, you have to experience the industry.

42 comments

March Kindle Sales Top $4200 and 5850 Ebooks

As of 11pm March 31, I made over $4200 on Kindle this month. That's over 5850 ebooks sold in just under four and a half weeks.

I'm pretty surprised by this number. And it has lead me to some startling conclusions.

Back in October, I looked at my ebook sales and said I'd never sell a book to a publisher for less than $30,000.

I've revised that a bit. I added a "1". My new number is $130,000.

This actually isn't as outrageous as it seems. Let me break it down.

Of my five best selling Kindle titles, four are original novels, and one (the novella TRUCK STOP) was written expressly for Kindle. Their average unit sales for this month were 880.

In June, Amazon is switching to the agency model, which means ebooks priced between $2.99 and $9.99 will earn the author a 70% royalty, minus a 6 cent delivery fee. Instead of making 70 cents per ebook sale like I'm currently doing, I can make $2.04 per sale.

If I put an original ebook novel on Kindle, going by my current average sales, I'd earn about $1800 a month on that title, or $21,600 per year.

That means, in six years, keeping my erights and steadily selling on Kindle alone, a single title could earn $129,600.

My first novel, Whiskey Sour, came out six years ago. During that time it has appeared in hardcover, and has had multiple editions in paperback. It has sold to ten countries. It's been an audiobook on cassette, CD, mp3, and download. It has also been an ebook, released by my publisher.

I've earned, with everything combined, around $50,000 on Whiskey Sour.

I think my royalties on Whiskey Sour are pretty good for a midlist author. The fact that it is still earning money six years later is rare, especially when I look at many of my peers who were also published in 2004 and are now out of print.

And yet, it's less than half of what I predict I can do releasing a Kindle-only title.

Of course, Kindle sales aren't a sure thing, even though mine have been steadily rising. Sales could begin to drop. The Kindle may become obsolete, like so many other technologies.

But my prediction for the future is I'll actually sell MORE ebooks than I expect, not less. I base these predictions on the trends I've seen in the industry, coupled with my own experiments. I've been blogging about Kindle for a year now, and my current numbers have exceeded my wildest expectations from back then.

And Kindle may be just the beginning.

My ebooks aren't up on Sony yet. They were just recently put up on Barnes and Noble. And naturally, I'll also sell my ebooks on the iPad. That's all extra income.

Plus, I believe the Kindle hasn't come close to critical mass yet. Over the next few years, the Kindle will get better, come down in price, and sell a lot more units.

Not only that, but I should still be able to exploit non-ebook rights. I could still sell print rights for novels, and audio rights, and foreign rights, and movie rights. I'm only talking about ebook sales here. And it makes no sense to give them to a publisher.

Let me repeat myself, because I've spoken with a lot of my peers who don't seem to grasp this point.

IT MAKES NO SENSE TO GIVE YOUR EBOOK RIGHTS TO A PUBLISHER.

Now there's always a chance my sales might drop if I raise my prices from $1.99 to $2.99. But I've been thinking about this a lot, and here is what I foresee:

1. The ebooks that my publishers own the rights to are priced between $4.70 and $9.99, and they're all doing well because readers are getting hooked on my $1.99 books and then buying the more expensive titles. I know this for two reasons. First, because my traditionally published ebooks didn't spike until I started getting popular with my self-published cheap ebooks. Second, because I've gotten dozens of emails from readers telling me that's what they did.

2. As an experiment, I raised one of my ebooks to $4.99. It made more money this month, even though it sold fewer copies, than last month at $1.99. And this is without the new agency royalty rate. Even if my sales dip, I'll still be more than doubling my current profits.

3. The difference between $1.99 and $2.99 isn't that big a deal, especially in comparison to what the major publishers are pricing at. Once the agency model takes hold, Big NY Publishing is going to sell ebooks at $12.99. I predict fewer sales for Big NY Authors, more for indie authors, even if we go up to $2.99.

4. If enough indie authors go up to $2.99, then it's the new bargain rate.

I've been part of the traditional publishing world for over a decade, and what's happening right now with ebooks is unprecedented. Not only do authors have a chance to directly reach a large pool of readers for the first time in history, but NY Publishing is so short-sighted they're making it easy for us to compete with them.

My ebook THE LIST has sold 12,000 copies in a year. At the agency rate, that's over $24k annually, assuming my numbers stay the same.

But I don't think they'll stay the same. I think my sales numbers will continue to go up, even when I raise the price to $2.99. Ereaders haven't hit their stride yet.

So if I were to take an original J.A. Konrath or Jack Kilborn novel and put it on Kindle, I believe $130,000 in six years is a modest prediction.

If I also take into account Sony, B&N, the iPad, and print, audio, and foreign rights, I can see $130,000 being just a starting point for the money one of my novels can earn.

Of course, that's my prediction for 2016. How about my predictions for 2010?

Let's say I put two original ebook novels on Kindle this year, and they sell on average as well as my top five best sellers.

That means I'll be selling 7560 ebooks per month. I'll err to the side of caution and say my sales drop off 25% because I'm raising the price to $2.99. That would mean I'd be selling 5670 ebooks a month. At $2.04 profit per download, that's still $11680 a month.

So between June 1 and December 31, I'm looking to earn $81,761 on Kindle alone. And that's being a pessimist.

If I take the optimist route, I'll assume my numbers won't drop off, they'll escalate, as they have in the past. Especially if I offer new, exclusive titles. Perhaps I'll sell 8000 ebooks per month. That would mean from June to December, I'd earn $114,240.

Being even more optimistic, I'll also put up another novella on Kindle, as well as the Newbie's Guide to Publishing ebook (over 360,000 words of writing advice.) And people will continue to buy Kindles. So let's really dream big and guesstimate I can eek out 9,000 sales a month.

That puts me at $128,520 for a seven month period. For just Kindle.

The shocking thing about this is that it isn't a pipe dream. It's entirely within the realm of possibility.

Is everyone reading this thinking "holy shit" just like I am?

110 comments

Paper Earthworks and Digital Tides

by Barry Eisler

Don't be misled by the self-serving narratives Amazon and Macmillan have advanced following their recent eBooks battle. Amazon's narrative is "We're Pro-Consumer;" Macmillan (and paper publishers in general) counter with "We're Anti-Monopoly." Neither of these narratives is untrue, but neither addresses the real cause of this war.

What's happening is this. Amazon is doing everything it can to speed the transition to eBooks because, in a digital world, Amazon's costs of shipping and storage essentially disappear. Paper publishers are doing everything they can to slow the transition to eBooks because, in a digital world, paper publishers' high hardback margins essentially disappear.

That's it. One side wants to improve its profits through lower costs; the other, through higher margins. Everything else is commentary, much of it misleading.

Paper publishing has been around a long time and hasn't changed much. Think of it as a castle, surrounded by earthworks built out of the high margins publishers enjoy on hardback books. Now imagine digital as a surging tide comprised of two elements: (1) increasingly low-cost, high-quality digital book readers; and (2) lower-priced digital books. Amazon has attacked publishing's fortifications first by introducing the Kindle, and second, by selling eBooks at a loss. Publishers can't counter the first strategy (and even if they could, it wouldn't matter -- Apple, B&N, Sony, and plenty of other players are constantly improving and lowering the costs of digital readers). They have found a way to temporarily counter the second, by forcing Amazon to price eBooks no lower than $15, which is what the battle with Macmillan was fought over.

But it was only a battle. In the wider war, digital readers will continue to get better, cheaper, and more widely adopted. As for the price of eBooks, publishers can only control the price of the what Amazon buys from them. If you were Amazon, therefore, and publishers had stymied one of the two prongs of your strategy for speeding the transition to digital, what would you do?

That's right. You'd speed your own transition to becoming a publisher. This has been happening anyway; all Macmillan has done is provide Amazon with an incentive to do it faster. In the coming months, therefore, expect to see Amazon announce that it's poached some combination of editors and writers from major paper publishers. It will then publish its own eBooks at whatever price it believes will most effectively speed the transition to digital. Drive the price of eBooks low enough, and consumers' perceptions of the value of all books will radically change. It's this changing perception publishers fear. Consumers will buy a $17 hardback if the eBook costs $15. Charge $5 for that same eBook, and $17 for a hardback becomes an impossible sell.

Earthworks are a static defense. Publishers can do a few things to make the walls marginally higher and thicker, but that's about it. Meanwhile, the force of the digital tide is always increasing. Eventually, a kinetic and ever stronger offense will overwhelm a static, finite defense. Either publishers don't know this, in which case they're deluded; or they do know it, in which case they're just playing for time while their employees

update their resumes. Either way, their position is grim. If they want to survive, they can't just hunker down behind their crumbling walls. They need an offense.

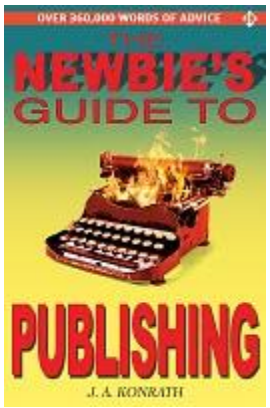
What would that offense be? The only solution I can imagine is for the major paper publishers to stop selling digital rights to Amazon and other retailers and establish their own well branded and managed online store. It's probably too late for them to make such a move anyway, but even if it weren't, the chances that a media industry could do something so radical are vanishingly small. And even if they did manage to pull it off, they'd keep eBook prices high to shore up their paper profits -- which is of course what they're doing now. Piracy would increase, and Amazon would muscle in with its own line of low-cost eBooks. To make it work, publishers would have to radically lower eBook prices and cannibalize their high-margin hardback sales. I've never heard of a company managing such a bold move, and I don't think a publisher will be the first to pull it off. But in a land of zero-cost distribution, with their primary competitive advantage further eroding every day, publishers need to establish their own direct link to consumers. If they don't, they'll offer no significant value in the changing ecosystem in which they find themselves, at which point they will become extinct.

I hope I don't sound unsympathetic. I make a good living selling hardback books through paper publishers and I have many friends in the industry who will suffer as it changes, so on a personal level the transition to digital isn't something I welcome wholeheartedly. But when analyzing a trend, it pays to set aside sentiment.

I used the word "extinct" above. It's hard to avoid the imagery the word naturally conjures: dinosaurs, blinking in frightened confusion as they find themselves encircled by new, hungry-looking predators encroaching on the territory that was once exclusively theirs. Dinosaurs had famously small brains. If publishers have an advantage in this regard, they need to start exploiting it.

28 comments

How To Format For Kindle



I'm a pretty tech savvy guy, but when I decided to turn my blog A Newbie's Guide to Publishing into an ebook, I knew I was in over my head. This was a hefty project, weighing in at 370,000 words. Besides getting it properly compiled and formatted, I also wanted a linkable table of contents. Though I know my way around HTML, I simply didn't have the skills to do it on my own.

So I turned to Rob Siders for help. Rob did a terrific job putting the ebook together. It was an incredibly difficult and complicated task to format this ebook, so I asked Rob if I could interview him to describe the process.

Rob, tell us a little about your background.

Rob Siders: When people ask what I do I always answer, "I write books that nobody ever, ever reads: software manuals!"

The long answer is I'm a technical writer who writes and produces at least a dozen computer how-to books every year for a Denver software company. Each one of those books, then, gets ported to one electronic format or another, whether to PDF (for offline use) or to XHTML (for online use). My days as a professional writer, however, stretch back to 1999.

Beyond that, when I'm not being a husband and new Dad, I'm currently in the muddy middle of writing novel number two.

Joe: Is Kindle difficult to format for?

Rob: Heh heh. You'd think it'd be a piece of cake… upload your book and let Amazon Digital Platform do the rest. But anytime you take your native document and try to automagically convert it to something else then you're sort of going on faith, hoping the thing that emerges on the other side resembles what it once was.

The Kindle conversion, presumably because it's a new tool, chokes on some of the things that Microsoft Word just does, like tabs, page breaks and curly quotes. We hardly think of those things as advanced formatting. So, as it goes, the more complexity you have in your document's formatting, the more fits Amazon's automated conversion is going to give you.

Take, for example, The Newbie's Guide to Publishing Book. It's a thousand pages with a table of contents, some pictures, and a bunch of hyperlinks. These are things Word does well and with ease. Click a button, and voila! You have a table of contents! Type a URL and Word makes it a clickable link. Want those pictures? Easy. Just copy and paste them.

But these things just kill a Kindle conversion.

What's more is that the Kindle format's file output is a very rudimentary version of HTML, which isn't that difficult to learn or work with, but when you're talking about a novel-length manuscript… that's a lot of code to sort through if you need to clean things up. And odds are pretty good that you will need to clean things up.

To give you another example, TNGTP's table of contents is almost 900 lines of HTML code after conversion to the Kindle format. The whole book is more than 30,000 lines of HTML code after conversion. It's an inelegant way to look at your work.

Joe: Do you have any tips for newbie writers trying to upload their ebooks?

Rob: Absolutely… keep your source document simple. As you know, formatting a manuscript — wide margins, double spacing, 25 lines per page, and name, title and page number in the header — is a great practical presentation to an agent or editor you're trying to attract to your book. After all, you want to look like a pro even if you're not. Especially if you're not.

But, again, that kind of stuff causes problems with Amazon's converter. At minimum, you should have two versions of your manuscript: one with as much rich formatting as is needed to present to agents or editors, and one that's relatively barebones for Kindle (even then be prepared to do some futzing with it before you click the Publish button).

Joe: If a newbie is looking to hire someone to help them format, what are some of the things they should look for? Questions they should ask?

Rob: Well, there's a guy in Denver who's really top-shelf! But seriously, if I were looking to hire someone for something like this I'd want someone who's experienced and who understands what my needs are. I'd also want someone who's accustomed to deadlines and who can turn out professional results.

Joe: How much do you charge for a Kindle conversion?

Rob: It really depends on the size and scope of the project, but budget a couple hundred dollars for fiction. Double that for non-fiction or picture books, because of the advanced text formatting, tables of contents, and image optimizing.

Joe: How should people send you their manuscripts?

Rob: Microsoft Word files are best, but I can convert PDFs, too. If all you have are hardcovers or paperbacks or paper versions of your manuscript, I can handle those conversions, too. It just takes a little longer and costs a bit more.

Joe: What are your predictions about the future of ebooks? Are we heading to an era where publishers are no longer needed?

Rob: Oooh. These are tasty ones. Back in the 90s, before I was a pro writer, I ran record stores for a small, Midwest-based independent chain that doesn't exist now. This was an interesting time to be in that business: everyone was expanding as CD sales fueled enormous growth. Labels were signing anyone who wore a guitar. But I remember as plain as day having three interactions, at different times, during that tenure.

The first was in 1993-ish. I was running one of the company's college-town stores. The campus was completely connected through a VAX system, which was the same system our stores used. The systems were closed to each other, of course, but they were basically using the same technology. One afternoon at a manager's meeting, I mused at how great it would be if the students could search our catalog database and place a special order or hold for a CD from a campus computer lab or their dorm rooms. The other managers looked at me like I had three heads.

For the second interaction, jump forward to sometime in 1996. A customer wanted a CD we didn't normally carry and asked whether I thought Amazon.com had it. I didn't own a computer at that point and had never seen the Internet (let alone the Amazon Web site), but I'd read enough stuff in the record industry trade magazines to know what she was talking about. I remember feeling threatened by her question.

The third interaction, in 1998, was with an employee who worked for me. He raved to me about the mp3 format… its compression, its virtually imperceptible loss in fidelity, and how you could, if you knew where to look, download off the Internet for free just about anything we carried in the store. I went home after work and learned more about it and quickly understood that the industry I loved was about to get clobbered.

Now, back to your questions… I don't think we're in any serious danger of losing analog books anytime soon. There're too many people like you and me and your readers who really love books. I'm talking deep, soulful connections to books and the stories they contain. In that respect, music lovers and book lovers are truly cut from the same cloth.

But the parallels between the publishing biz now and the record biz a decade ago couldn't be clearer. And it's not just the pervasiveness of digital products and their associated devices. It's also the way in which the Internet allows producers, artists, whatever you want to call them, to make their work available to people and then build a following. There's a place for publishing companies and record labels, but producers and consumers can go around them now in ways that evolve faster than traditional companies can. The band Panic at the Disco got discovered on MySpace. Comedian Dane Cook used social networking to catapult himself from the club circuit to Madison Square Garden. New York Times best-selling horror novelist Scott Sigler got there by first serializing his books and releasing them as free podcasts. Of course, these people have extraordinary results. But, like you, they promote the hell out of themselves, then and now, without necessarily relying on a giant corporation's money or help.

I think, even though it's been underway a while, we're just beginning to see the publishing industry's clobbering. They're fighting it like the music industry did (and continues to do in some ways). But, until they figure out how to adapt, it's a fight they're going to lose.

Joe: Thanks for your insights, Rob, and for the great job you did with Newbie's Guide.

If you're an author with a backlist and want to get your work up on Kindle, even if the only thing you have is a paperback copy, I suggest contacting Rob. And if you've tried uploading to Kindle yourself and got frustrated because your book looked like crap, Rob can help with that, too.

Visit him at http://www.52novels.com/kindle_services and tell him I sent you.

1 comments

Reviews

Views on Reviews

Everyone in the publishing business realizes the important of reviews.

A review is part advertisement, part endorsement. Studies have shown that even the bad ones are useful in boosting sales. That's why publicists, and authors, spend much of their time and money getting books into the hands of those who review.

Internet reviews are thriving. In the mystery field, a good review or mention on websites (www.booksnbytes.com), listservs (www.dorothyl.com), newsgroups (news:rec.arts.mystery), and even blogs (www.sarahweinman.blogspot.com) can reach thousands of fans, and these are fans who buy books. Unlike newspapers or magazines, the World Wide Web allows people to respond, interact, and debate.

A print review will run for a day. An Internet review can circulate forever.

The downside is that amateur reviews are written by amateurs, and sometimes give away spoilers, or fail to convey any plot points whatsoever, or have grammar or spelling or coherency problems.

Sometimes there's even doubt that the reviewer has read the book at all.

There's a certain Internet reviewer named Harriet Klausner who has somehow managed to review every single book released in the past five years. I don't know anyone who has actually met Harriet. Perhaps it's because, like Shakespeare, she's actually a dozen people working in tandem (one of which is the Earl of Sandwich). Or perhaps it's because she's hooked up to a feeding tube and IV, never able to leave her bed due to reading and reviewing thirty books a day.

Though Harriet's reviews rarely amount to anything more than a brief retelling of the plot and a generic comment about how good it was (she never pans a book), I've seen her name and comments on actual book jackets, and I've heard that many publishers send her galleys.

The line between amateur and professional has become very blurred.

Professional reviewers have (or should have) a certain level of writing ability, some professional standards, and a realization that their opinion is only a part of what constitutes a review.

For the time being, the professional reviews dominate the public mindset, and these tend to be the ones that get into print. What did the Times say? Does Publishers Weekly like it? Can we salvage anything quotable from that Kirkus review?

The print reviewers were (mostly) kind to Whiskey Sour, and I was able to cull some good quotes for the paperback edition. I've been keeping my fingers crossed for Bloody Mary, because everyone has told me that reviewers are traditionally harder on the second novel.

The finger-crossing paid off, because I just received a good review in Kirkus for Bloody Mary. But my excitement was short-lived, because *there is absolutely nothing I can quote from the review.*

While being very complimentary of my book, the way the review has been written makes it impossible to crop out a sentence or liberate a phrase for use in my promotional material. The reviewer seemed to enjoy it, but never came right out and said that.
For example, "Jack and her partner, Det. Herb Benedict, have him in their sights, and that's when the fun really begins."

Obviously the compliment is "the fun really begins," inferring that the book is fun, but they didn't come out and say, "the book is fun."

Another line, later on, is, "Konrath keeps the proceedings moving so briskly that you may not even notice how many corpses are piling up —over a dozen, with plenty more in the backstory."

Again, there's a reference to "briskly moving," but worded in a way that's very hard to extract. Plus, the entire sentence draws attention to the violence in the book, which I wouldn't exactly call a selling point. Nor would I entirely agree with it (I would swear I killed less than a dozen people...)

A friend of mine is a genius (read: shameless) when it comes to paraphrasing reviews. He once took the quote "Astonishingly bad!" from the London Times and trimmed it to, "Astonishing..." - The London Times.

It made his cover.

I don't think I'll ever be that brazen. But talk to me again in ten years.

I have another friend who had a review so bad all he could cull was, "the book had... characters... a plot."

That one didn't make the cover. You win some, you lose some.

Ultimately, not being able to quote Kirkus isn't a big deal. The libraries and bookstores that read Kirkus will get the point, and hopefully be swayed enough to stock my book.

In the meantime, I'm waiting, scissors in hand, for more reviews. They can even be from amateurs with spoilers and spelling mistakes and coherency problems.

As Oscar Wilde said, "It's better to be talked about, than not talked about."

But I'm paraphrasing there...

6 comments

Reviewing Reviews

I just got a pair of reviews for my latest Jack book, FUZZY NAVEL (July 8, 2008), and it got me thinking about something:

Reviews sell books.

I know this for a fact, because I buy books after reading reviews. It doesn't even matter if the book was given a thumbs up or thumbs down. I read reviews for content, not opinion, and reviews alert me to the existence of the types of books I normally buy.

If this works on me, I'm guessing it works on other people. As a counter example, I've never bought a book because I ate a piece of candy with the book cover image glued to the wrapper. Because of this, I don't pass out snacks to potential fans. But I do try to get reviews.

Unfortunately, getting reviewed is becoming harder and harder.

The first reason: Too much competition. There are 200,000 books being released every year, and too little space to review them in. The bestsellers get preferential treatment, leaving the rest of us midlisters to fight for scraps.

The second reason: Too few publications review books. As newspaper circulation dwindles, so does advertising by publishers, which reduces or eliminates the book review pages.

I haven't gotten a lot of print reviews. No big ones like the NYT, ET, or People, and not many by bigger newspapers. My big hometown paper, The Chicago Tribune, has never reviewed me, even though my books are set in Chicago. Though my other two Chicago papers, The Sun-Times and the Daily Herald, have reviewed me, but in both of those cases knowing the reviewer probably had something to do with it.

Genre mags have been good to me, and I've been reviewed in EQMM, The Strand, Mystery Scene, and Crimespree, but they've each missed a few titles.

The trade mags (Booklist, Kirkus, Library Journal, PW) have all reviewed me, but again they've missed a title here and there.

The Internet has been very kind. Lots of book review sites and blogs have mentioned my books, and Amazon.com reviewers continue to post their comments about my oeuvre.

How does a writer get reviews?

Usually a publicist, either in-house or independent, sends out galleys or ARCs to reviewers along with a brief letter and perhaps a press release. Reviewers can receive over a hundred books a week, even though they only have space in their column to review six books.

Sometimes an author will send books directly to reviewers, and this personal touch may improve their chances. But it's expensive, time consuming, and there is still no guarantee you'll be reviewed.

A good way to get reviewed is to already be a bestseller. Then reviewers will seek out the book, because they know their readers are anxious to hear it. But even then, some reviewers might pass on reviewing the latest Patricia Cornwell if given the chance, and might embrace a smaller author whose book they adored.

Since competition for print reviews is so stiff, many authors are concentrating on the Internet. The World Wide Web has the advantage of being Googleable forever, which can lead people to your book for years after it's been published. But most of the review sites are small, getting very few hits. While it may be great that you're reviewed on 100 blogs, you have to consider the cost-effectiveness of it. Sending out 100 ARCs will cost about $500 (double if you have to pay for your own ACRs), and you may only be reaching an audience of 50,000 people total. Two million people read the Tribune, and it only cost you $5 to send the ARC.

I've seen authors offer free copies of books to Amazon reviewers, which seems silly considering the very small number of books Amazon actually sells.

I've also seen authors give free books to bloggers, which is a somewhat better prospect, but even then you have to consider cost-effectiveness.

It's a dismal situation.

Writers and publishers spend big money on ads and fancy multimedia websites, with unspectacular results.

They spend big money on galleys and ARCs, even though the overwhelming majority of them don't lead to reviews.

More and more books are being released, with less and less print venues to review them in, and Interent reviews are probably not cost-effective to procure.

So what's the answer? Here are a few:

1. Buy reviews. I'm not talking about paying a reviewer. I'm talking about getting a more famous peer to review your book, then using that as the basis for print ads. If your publisher has an advertising budget, it's a much better use of their money if they run 200 words about your latest, reviewed by a known writer, than the standard book cover/author photo/blurb.

2. Schmooze. Reviewers are people. Meet them. Be nice to them. Chances are they'll remember you, and you'll have a better shot at being reviewed than the thousands of authors they don't know.

3. Give away ebooks. While mailing out review copies to people with small blogs probably isn't cost effective, you can email them a pdf file of your latest for free. You'll have to clear this with your publisher first. Remind them how much they spend on galleys.

4. Become a reviewer. Many of us have blogs and MySpace pages. There is also Shelfari, Twitter, GoodReads, Amazon, BN.com, and many others. Review your fellow authors in as many places as possible.

What are some other good places to post reviews? I want to hear them. By the end of the week I'd like to have a semi-comprehensive list of all the major places fans can review books. Then I'll repost this blog entry with the list at the bottom, to the service of all writerdom.

In the meantime, I humbly ask you to review my books in as many places as humanly possible.
Yes, I'm serious. Review my books. Right now.

30 comments

The New Zoo Review

Let's talk about reviews.

The four main reviewing publications are ***Library Journal, Booklist, Kirkus,*** and ***Publishers Weekly.*** There are also hundreds of newspapers and magazines, and thousands of websites, that review books. Some reviewers are professional (paid.) Some are semi-professional (not paid but they appear in respectable publications.) Some are simply readers without any writing experience who share their thoughts on **Amazon.com** or elsewhere.

If you're a writer, you want to be reviewed in as many places as possible. A good review in a respectable publication will lead to three important things: in-house enthusiasm, bookseller and library orders, and sales to fans.

Consider **Marcus Sakey**, whose novel **The Blade Itself** recently received a starred review in ***PW*** which said, *"A brilliant debut and a must-read, filled with unbearable tension."* Will that help him sell some books? Of course it will. Do you think that made his publisher happy? Of course it did. It also made Marcus happy, and for three days afterward he was forced to tether himself to a chair to keep from floating away.

Any review is better than no review at all. **Whiskey Sour** received some good reviews: *"The best debut of the year so far."* - ***Chicago Sun Times***, and *"A fine debut thriller."* - ***Kirkus.***

But it also received some less than glowing reviews: *"This ill-conceived cross between Carl Hiaasen and Thomas Harris should appeal to less-descriminating suspense fans."* - ***PW.***

Bloody Mary also got reamed by ***PW***: *"Konrath's predictable sequel is no more original than its predecessor."*

Oddly enough, ***PW's*** review of **Rusty Nail** began: *"Konrath's third outing to feature Chicago police lieutenant Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels, like its predecessors, Whiskey Sour and Bloody Mary, offers violent thrills peppered with hilarious one-liners."*

Even bad reviews can sell books. It's better to be talked about in negative terms than not talked about at all. A review has your name and book title on it. If a person sees your name and title enough, it will stick in their head. You want to stick in their head.

Some writers claim they don't read their reviews, and perhaps they are telling the truth. I read all of my reviews. But I don't *listen* to *any* of my reviews. I don't take them to heart. Everyone is entitled to their opinion, and all opinions are valid. I'd much rather have someone read me and hate me than never try me at all.

How does one get reviewed? It isn't easy. Reveiwers are bombarded with books. If your book is a lead title, you're a brand author, or there's a lot of buzz about it, you're likelier to be reviewed. Your publisher (or you) sends advanced reading copies to reviewers at least three months ahead of your street date, and you cross your fingers.

I didn't get as many reviews for **Rusty Nail** than I did for my previous books. This is something I'm going to work on changing for **Dirty Martini.** My plan is to send out the books myself, signed copies with personalized letters. **David Ellis** did this with **In the Company of Liars**, and tripled the number of reviews he normally received.

The hitman anthology I edited, **These Guns for Hire**, hits the streets today. It just received a glowing review in ***Booklist***, which said: *"Readers who aren't keen on stories about paid assassins probably will pass on this collection, but that's their loss. For everyone else, it's a guaranteed hit."* ***Library Journal*** also commented: *"The many pleasures of pulp are here in abundance, befitting on several levels the anthology's subject."*

I was happy. My publisher was happy. Hopefully it will help us sell a few.

Amazon.com has allowed reader comments for many years now. But just recently, they have allowed people to comment on comments. If you don't agree with a user review, you can post a rebuttle connected to their review.

I've gotten my share of negative reviews on Amazon, and when I saw that I was now able to reply to some of my critics, I considered it. But what would be the point? Would starting a flame war with some reader on Amazon help me sell books, or make me look like a petty egotist?

So I haven't replied to any comments. I do, however, encourage everyone who has read my books to leave comments on Amazon. We should all do that. I've reviewed several dozen books on Amazon, because it's a simple and effective way to support my peers.

33 comments

Review Redux

I just got a really good review from Publisher's Weekly for my latest book, DIRTY MARTINI, and it got me thinking about something:

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I know this for a fact, because I buy books after reading reviews. It doesn't even matter if the book was given a thumbs up or thumbs down. I read reviews for content, not opinion, and reviews alert me to the existence of the types of books I normally buy.

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2. Schmooze. Reviewers are people. Meet them. Be nice to them. Chances are they'll remember you, and you'll have a better shot at being reviewed than the thousands of authors they don't know.

3. Give away ebooks. While mailing out review copies to people with small blogs probably isn't cost effective, you can email them a pdf file of your latest for free. You'll have to clear this with your publisher first. Remind them how much they spend on galleys.

4. Enlist your fans. Why not use a portion of your marketing budget to reward the folks who already buy your books? If you have a blog, MySpace, website, and/or newsletter, tell your fanbase if anyone writes and posts a review of your latest book on their website, blog, MySpace, Amazon, BN.com, etc, you'll send them something. Maybe a signed bookplate. Maybe a signed magazine you have a story in. This could run

a few hundred bucks, but it will reach more people and cost much less than going to an out-of-state writing conference. You can do this for several weeks after your book comes out, or you can do it forever.

5. Become a reviewer. I've written several dozen of Amazon reviews. I've also posted reviews on various sites, and have even had a few reviews published. We need to help each other, and you reap what you sow. And on that note, DIRTY MARTINI will be out July 3. To paraphrase a bit of PW's lovely review:

"Konrath's latest is a particularly potent mix of equal parts mirth and mayhem with a dash of sex and a twist (or two) of plot. It should be taken straight, no chaser needed."

Want to review DIRTY MARTINI? Email me at haknort@comcast.net.

20 comments

Haters

I got this email a few days ago:

Dear Sir:
I find your Book, Rusty Nail, despicable! You must be a very sick person to think up such garbage! Why would you think anyone would want to read such? The cover of your book, and the fly-leaf, give NO indication of such filth inside.

Your publisher should be ashamed to be that hard up for something to publish! He's as bad as O.J. Simpson's publisher!

Barnes and Noble should be ashamed to offer such a book for sale, and your publisher, and Barnes and Noble, should , at the VERY least, warn readers of the content!

With great regret! Carol A.

— — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —-

My first reaction was to laugh. While my books have bright, colorful, attractive covers, anyone reading the jacket flaps can easily find references to the filth —er —edgy stuff inside.

Coincidentally, a few days later people started bashing the violence in my books on a popular listserv, bemoaning the graphic violence.

I don't usually defend my writing. If a reader doesn't like something I wrote, the piece failed the reader. It's as simple as that. I'm not perched on their shoulder while they read, saying "This is why I wrote that scene and what I was trying to accomplish" so I see no reason to do it ex post facto.

But this made me curious, so I reread Rusty Nail (I hadn't read it since I turned it in, two years ago) and tried to see if I'd actually gone too far.

I hadn't. While bad things happen in Rusty Nail (snuff videos, torture, mutilation), they happen off-screen. There are no lingering depictions of violence, or even graphic descriptions of anything disturbing. When writing a violent scene, I adhere to 'less is more' and leave the gore up to the reader's imagination.

I am, however, confronted with a business dilemma. Do I want to alienate potential readers and risk sales?

There are two schools of thought here. The first says that safe, homogenous entertainment reaches a broader audience. The second says that unique visions and approaches might polarize an audience, leading to controversy, which leads to a slightly less broad but more passionate audience.

Let's get the integrity issue out of the way: I have very little. Writing is a job. It's a job I love, but I'm never so attached to any of my words that I'll refuse to change them, especially in the face of potential dollars.

So do I want to tone down the violence in my books? John Sandford did it in his Prey series. Ridley Pearson did it in his Lou Boldt series. Jeffrey Deaver did it. Spenser did it. Lots of authors mellow out.

But do they mellow out and then reach a larger audience? Or does the violence of the early books invite controversy, which leads to a larger audience? Does anyone besides me miss Lucas Davenport and Lou Boldt and Lincoln Rhyme chasing psychopaths? Did the serial killers make them bestsellers, or did they become bestsellers after they ditched the serial killers?

It's sort of a moot point. DIRTY MARTINI, coming out in 2007, has no serial killers and no blood. It still has (hopefully) scares, but not of the *being stalked and sliced up* kind.

What do you think? I know being talked about is always better than not being talked about, but would you rather be controversial re: Thomas Harris or Dan Brown, or universally loved re: Michael Connelly or Robert Crais?

59 comments

Success = Pnwed

Call me crazy, but I believe that when a writer creates a character, they're allowed to decide what that character says and does.

But, strangely enough, when a writer reaches a certain level of success, they have less control rather than more.

A few weeks ago I was at a local restaurant-slash-arcade watching some people play the new Rambo video game, which involved shooting large plastic assault weapons at a giant screen. When David Morrell created the character more than thirty years ago, he probably couldn't have conceived of it some day being a coin-operated attraction. But when David sold the rights to that novel, and that character, others were able to decide what Rambo did.

Rights, however, don't matter much to fans. I've noticed a growing trend on Amazon.com where fans somehow feel justified in saying authors aren't being true to the characters they've created.

I'm guilty of this myself. My very first (and only negative) Amazon review was of Hannibal written by Thomas Harris. I was hugely disappointed in how Harris had turned the ultimate evil serial killer into a hero who only kills rude people.

Apparently I helped to spearhead a disturbing trend, because in recent years there have been thousands of fans heaping such criticism at Anne Rice, Patricia Cornwell, Janet Evanovich, Karin Slaughter, Lee Child, and many others, claiming these authors have disrespected their own protagonists.

What a fascinating social phenomenon this is.

It's one thing liking or disliking a book. But it is something else entirely for a reader to take ownership of a character, and to chastise the creator of that character for causing said character to do things the reader doesn't believe that character should do. Can you imagine painting a picture of a duck and then having other people tell you that it isn't a duck at all?

Expectation plays a huge part in this. When we're entertained by things we've read, we expect more of the same. But when the writer does something that we don't agree with, then our expectations aren't met, and we're disappointed and perhaps even angry.

Consider how odd this is. Characters are no longer confined to the page, or to the imagination of the writer. They exist in the minds of the readers. And if something on the page doesn't mesh with what is going on in the reader's head, the author is to blame.

But the author really can't be untrue to a character they created. It's impossible. As the creator, the author can chose to do whatever they want with the character. There is no intrinsic right or wrong, true or untrue, fair or unfair.

Yet readers can become attached to characters to the point where they take ownership of them, and then they decide for the writer what is allowed and what isn't. If they believe that the writer wasn't true to their own creation, the 1 star scathing reviews begin to accrue.

Does this affect the writer? It has to, to some degree. All opinions are valid, even if you disagree with them. The artistic part of the writer can't help but be hurt by the negative comments, and the business part of the writer can't help but think that haters can't really be good for the bottom line.

So does that mean, when you reach a certain level of success, creativity is more about placation than invention?

I haven't reached a level where I get scads of emails from people who don't like what I've done with my characters. But I can foresee it happening. Books are like children, and once they're out in public the writer/parent has little control over what they do and how they effect others. Success means you will invariably disappoint a segment of your audience.

Strangely, though, our expectations and opinions can change. We've all seen movies that we disliked, then saw them again and liked them, and vice versa. Art needs an audience, and is only endowed with the attributes we ascribe to it. In other words, what you bring to the table may be more important than what's being served.

So now I look back on my review of Hannibal and I think I was wrong. Not in disliking the book, but in blaming Harris for my disappointment. Hannibal Lector belongs to Thomas Harris, and only he can dictate what his character does. He saw his character differently than I did, and he's allowed to do that because he created him. I'm allowed to dislike the choices that Harris made, but I have to realize that biases and expectations aren't on the page; they're in my head.

Because we're such an opinionated species, and because the Internet allows for the anonymity to say things we'd never say in public, we're quick to voice our disappointment in public forums.

But maybe instead of rushing to post that 1 star review we should try to figure out who is truly to blame...

3 comments

Everyone's A Critic

As newspapers and periodicals fold, downsize, and decline in popularity, it's getting harder and harder to get books reviewed.

Reviews sell books. Not necessarily because a book critic recommends it, but because a review makes readers aware a book exists. If a reader is looking for the next book by a certain author, or is looking for a certain genre or type of book to buy, reviews serve as a reminder or a spotlight, sort of like advertising, but with relevant content.

But as the Internet continues to infringe upon print, more and more people are reading reviews online. And the majority of these reviews aren't from paid critics, but from laypeople with blogs, or who post on websites like Shelfari or Goodreads or Amazon.com.

While I mourn the gradual demise of professional print reviews, I embrace this new form of critiquing books. And I'm not the only one. I've lost count of the number of Harriet Klausner reviews (Amazon's #1 reviewer) I've seen on books, some even on the back covers.

Rather than read the NYT Book Review section, more and more readers are deciding what to buy based on blogs they read, or the average star ratings on Amazon. This grass roots type of reviewing is less like advertising, and more like word of mouth, which readers of this blog know I prefer.

But it comes at a cost. Because the world wide web makes it possible for everyone to post their opinion, many people do just that. And because the Internet offers distance and a certain amount of anonymity, many people see no problem with viciously ripping apart books they don't like.

On one hand, everyone has an opinion, and all opinions are valid.

On the other hand, you'd think reading some online reviews that the author being described is an illiterate pinhead, barely capable of stringing words together, who hates his fans and should have never been published in the first place and should be monetarily liable for the time the reviewer wasted reading the first two chapters.

I'm all for personal expression. And the Internet is truly a bottom-up (as opposed to top-down) way to communicate. We no longer have to rely on professionals, or corporations, for our news or entertainment. We've become a world where everyone can be famous, where all opinions can be heard.

This mentality has lead to uploading videos on YouTube, sharing pictures on Flicker, being able to create and edit our own encyclopedia with Wikipedia, posting news and op-ed on blogs, publishing ourselves on our websites, creating our own flash movies and games, and basically becoming the creator rather than being content with staying the consumer.

Unfortunately, for everyone who desires to create, there is someone who seems compelled to destroy.

The number of 1 star reviews on Amazon.com, and on the movie site IMDB.com, frankly astound me. Apparently it's easier to hate something, and there's a lot more to hate, than I ever imagined.

The reality is, most movies and books don't suck. There are some bad ones, sure. But each had to meet some minimal standards in order to get produced. Books released by major houses are acquired because the house believes they have some value, and will make some money. Many people are involved in a book's creation.

Yet the cavalier, dismissive attitude of many online amateur critics is a symptom of a larger problem within society, compounded by the fact that there's no accountability.

The problem I'm speaking of can be summed up in a single word: haters.

Haters tend to be quick with opinions, actively judge without fully understanding what they're judging, and have little concept of the effort it takes to create a story, film, book, TV show, or any other form of media.

Rather than create anything on their own, which is probably too difficult for them to do, they enjoy the sound of their own whining while tearing down what others have created. Because the Internet doesn't require accountability, they write things they'd never say face-to-face, which makes them cowards as well.

Personally, haters amuse me. In most cases, it's obvious these folks are clueless. Authors should NEVER EVER respond to haters, because it legitimizes them. No good can come from responding, and the fleeting satisfaction you'd get from calling someone "a waste of carbon" even if they truly are a waste of carbon, is a loss, not a victory.

But I urge anyone who has ever publicly lambasted a book, movie, TV show, song, whatever to consider these criteria before rushing to your one-star review.

WHAT HATERS NEED TO KNOW

1. Opinions change, including yours. Have you ever seen a movie, hated it, then caught it again and realized it was pretty good? A myriad of things can affect whether or not you enjoy something that has nothing whatsoever to do with anything intrinsic in the work.

2. Art is labored over. It involves time, effort, and often love, usually from many people involved in its creation.

3. Make an effort to understand art before you begin to cut down art.

4. You're a big stupid unhappy idiot, and no one likes you, and not a single person gives a shit about your snide comments or unhelpful opinions, and if you could pull your head out of your ass long enough to realize that fact you would do the world a favor and eat a bowl of Ambien and then go for a swim. Also, you smell bad.

Don't be a hater. If you dislike something, go ahead and voice your opinion, but be thoughtful in that opinion, and respect the artist. No one likes a whiner. Don't be one.

Now I challenge anyone who has ever given a negative review to defend that review or remove it. Or are you too cowardly to do so?

47 comments

The Importance of Reviews

Let's talk about reviews.

I've had my share of good reviews, and a few bad reviews, and I know different people have different tastes so I take it all in stride.

But today's blog isn't about professional reviews. Because, frankly, newspapers and magazines are going under faster than we can count them.

Today I want to talk about a type of reviews that are gaining popularity. The ones people are actually listening to.

Reader reviews.

It's no secret that word-of-mouth is the strongest form of book promotion. When was the last time you bought a book because you saw an ad for it? Compare that to a friend who says, "Oh my god, you have to read this!"

Chances are, the friend is more persuasive than the ad.

Which brings us to this wonderful form of communication known as the Internet.

For the first time, in the history of reviewing, anyone with a computer and a modem can share their opinions with the entire world. And people are doing just that, in record numbers, on dozens of different websites and thousands of different blogs, newsgroups, listservs, and message boards.

And I'll be 100% honest here: your words do count.

We've all been on Amazon.com, wondering if we should or shouldn't buy a certain book. What sways us one way or the other?

The reviews do. An average of three or more stars usually means I'll take a chance and buy the book. Less then two stars means I'll get my copy from the library, if at all.

In the past, high-profile critics told us what we should and shouldn't like. But now, majority rules, and the masses are a pretty good judge of if a book is good or not.

Which brings me to a question I'd like to ask: Do you post reviews?

I have a vested interest in reviews and being reviewed, because I'm a writer.

But I'm also a reader. A reader who enjoys sharing his opinion. A reader who thinks it's important to play cheerleader for my peers. A reader who recognizes how important a few sentences can be to someone considering buying a book.

So I've posted my fair share of Amazon.com reviews, and I've posted a few on some other sites as well.

Could I do more? Sure.

Now how about you?

If you believe reader reviews are helpful, if you love books as much as I do, if you want to help authors that you enjoy, why aren't you posting more reviews?

You really don't have any excuses. If you're a writer, it's a no-brainer: you're helping to propagate the species, and what goes around comes around. If you're a reader, it's a no-brainer: your review will help a writer sell more books, and we all know what happens to writers who don't sell enough.

So where should you post reviews?

Amazon.com is an obvious choice. But very few people also post those same reviews on its sister sites, Amazon.co.uk and Amazon.ca.

Other bookstore sites that allow for reviews are www.BN.com, Borders.com and BooksaMillion.com. You could write a five sentence review, then post it on all of these sites in less than ten minutes.

You can also post your reviews, and meet like-minded fellow readers and writers, at Shelfari.com,LibraryThing.com, and Goodreads.com.

If you're a mystery fan, you can post reviews on Booksnbytes.com, or join the Listserv DorothyL.com, or visit the newsgroup news:rec.arts.mystery on Usenet.

Other places to post include ibookdb.net/reviews, BestSellersWorld.com,Horror-mall.com,Crimespace.ning.com, and Redroom.com.

And don't forget your social networking sites, www.MySpace.com,Facebook.com, and www.Twitter.com.

If you're really hardcore, and have an eye for detail, you can edit www.wikipedia.com and add your favorite authors, along with synopses of their best books.

Your opinion really does matter. And authors really do care.

Newsletters

Newsletter Blues

Over Memorial Day weekend I emailed newsletter #5 to about 10,000 people.

While most of the recipients joined the newsletter willingly, I send it out to everyone in my addressbook, and I have no idea how some of those folks got in my addressbook.

So, every newsletter, I get a few dozen removal requests, and I invariably annoy someone enough for them to take me to task for spamming. Which amuses me, because in my newsletter, I never try to sell anything.

Marketing, and advertising, is intrusive by nature. To soften the blow, I make sure my newsletter offers things, rather than asks for things.

I announce new contests, and pick the winners for old contests.

I give away free stuff.

I mention upcoming appearances, so people can find me on the road.

I mention new stuff coming out, though I never provide a link to buy anything, or even request that it be bought at all.

In the recent newsletter, I also invited everyone to my booklaunch party.

As an experiment, I did something a little sneaky. I provided folks with a time and place for my party, but left off the date. I had two reasons for this:

1. I figured that those who want to come would seek out the information on my website (which I just redesigned), or email me. Personal correspondence is always good, and it would give me a rough head count of attendees.

2. I was curious if the newsletter was actually getting read, or simply deleted.

My experiment yielded the following information.

1. People did email me, asking when the party was, and confirming their intentions to be there.

2. A lot of folks read my whole newsletter. Many read it several times, looking for the party date.

3. Several hundred people who had no intention of going to my party politely pointed out that I'm a bonehead for forgetting to mention the party date.

Which goes back to one of the basics of marketing. If you're going to provide information, don't make people hunt for it. Provide it all in one place.

Still, replying to everyone who emailed me is good public relations, and now I have a better idea of how much beer I need to buy for the party (a lot).

In my next newsletter, I'll be more direct.

I'm also going to provide a link to generic vi*gra for only $1.99 a dose.

And as for the booklaunch party, it's June 18, noon until 2pm.

But I'm not saying where.

2 comments

Newsletters

A newsletter is an opportunity to pass information and entertainment along to fans. I don't advocate sending more than a few a year, and they should only be sent to people who sign up for it. I use www.ymlp.com as a mass mailing service and sign-up/removal boxes are on my website and MySpace page.

As with all kinds of promotion, newsletters are about what you have to offer, not what you have to sell. I believe mine have gotten better over the years, and I've included them all here so you can witness the evolution.

The first few were all about announcements, and I experimented with various HTML layouts. Later I changed to straight text, and began to offer more than simple infodumps.

Notice also how they go from many a year to one or two a year.

Besides the newsletters, I've also attached some MySpace bulletins, as examples of various ways to reach and amuse your readers.

STRAIGHT UP

The Official Newsletter of author Joe Konrath
APRIL 27, 2003 VOL 1, NO 1

JOE SIGNS 3 BOOK DEAL!

Welcome to the premiere issue of the Joe Konrath newsletter. You're on this mailing list for one of these reasons:

a) You know me.

b) You signed up for this.

c) One of your friends knows me, and gave me your email address in exchange for beer.

There's a lot going on in my life right now, but here's the biggest news: my incredible agent, Jane Dystel, landed me a three book, six-figure deal with Hyperion Books. My novel, WHISKEY SOUR, will be released in hardcover, Spring of 2004.

WHISKEY SOUR is the first book in the Lt. Jacqueline Daniels series. Jack is a forty-something cop with a train wreck of a personal life and a mean case of insomnia. When a nutcase who calls himself The Gingerbread Man begins dumping mutilated bodies in her precinct, Jack finds herself in charge the biggest, and most dangerous, case of her career.

My editor at Hyperion, Leslie Wells, calls the book "an amazing combination of humor and fear... I was laughing out loud through much of it, and the Gingerbread Man material is SO chilling, really terrifying."

Leslie has the distinction of having edited two of my very favorite authors, Robert Crais (creator of the Elvis Cole series) and Ridley Pearson (creator of the Lou Boldt series).

Working with Leslie has been a HUGE honor, and if I ever become really rich I'm buying her a sports car.

As the publication date nears, I'll keep everyone informed about when and where to pick up WHISKEY SOUR.

Until then, I'd highly recommend checking out some of the Crais and Pearson books — they're the best in the field.

NEW WEBSITE COMPLETE

With the help of Opus Graphics, my new homepage, www.joekonrath.com, is now up and running.

On the site you'll find free stories, novel excerpts, background info, writing tips, character bios, a message board, and lots of other really cool stuff.

Check it out. All the hip people are doing it.

If you're an author with a website, drop me a line. My links page is crammed full of writers that I know and admire, and you might very well be the next scribe on my reading list.

ELLERY QUEEN BUYS JACK DANIELS STORY

The most famous genre fiction zine on the planet is Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, produced ten times a year by the wonderful folks at Dell. Besides having a huge circulation of 50,000+, Ellery Queen has published most, if not all, of the greatest mystery writers in history.

I just received my first acceptance letter from Ellery Queen.

My locked room mystery, ON THE ROCKS —a short story featuring Lt. Jacqueline Daniels — will appear in an upcoming issue of EQMM. I'll know more soon, and will keep everyone posted.

I've been reading Ellery Queen since I was ten years old, and this is a huge thrill for me. It's also a thrill for Jack, who cites this as one of her most puzzling and unusual cases.

FIRST STORY PUBLISHED

Though not as well known as Ellery Queen, the dark fiction magazine HORROR GARAGE has the distinction of buying my very first story.

My nasty little tale, FINICKY EATER, will appear in their upcoming issue #7, sometime in June.

HORROR GARAGE is cutting edge, slick, and ultra-cool. You can pick up your very own copy at www.horrorgarage.com, or at Tower Records, Border's Books, and many other fine indie bookstores and music shops.

1ST SHORT STORY CONTEST

One of the things I promised to do, if I ever attained any degree of success, is to help other writers. This is a tough, discouraging business, and it can flatten even the hardiest egos.

Besides posting writing tips and tricks on my website, www.joekonrath.com, I'm also teaching fiction writing and marketing at the College of Dupage in Glen Ellyn, Illinois this Fall. If you live in the area, check it out. More info at www.cod.edu.

I've also decided to run a bi-monthly short fiction contest. Here are the rules for Contest Number 1:

1) Stories must be unpublished and less than 3500 words.

2) Stories must be in the mystery, suspense, or horror genre.

3) Stories must be typed, double-spaced, and sent to me either in the body of an email (no attachments), or snail mail to:

Joe Konrath

836 Carnaby Ct.

Schaumburg, IL 60194

4) All entries must be received by June 30, 2003, only one submission per person.

I'll personally read all the entries, and try to offer editing advice when I can.

The winner will receive:

A SIGNED COPY OF SOMETHING I WROTE (GALLEY, CHAPBOOK, MAGAZINE STORY, ETC.)

THEIR NAME AS A CHARACTER IN MY NEXT BOOK.

SPECIAL MENTION ON MY WEBSITE.

And... my help in submitting their story to a paying market. I'll assist the winner in writing a query letter, and lend my name and endorsement to their cause.

The results will be published in Issue #2.

What are you waiting for? Get writing!

THANKS!

After many years of writing, editing, rewriting, submitting, rewriting, and rewriting, I'm finally reaching some of the goals I set for myself as a teenager.

I want to offer my heartfelt thanks to my family, my friends, and all of the writers, editors, and industry pros who have offered their unwavering support and encouragement throughout the various stages of my career.

My success is yours, too.

The Joe Konrath Newsletter never ever sells, gives away, or otherwise compromises the email addresses of its subscribers, nor does it intentionally spam anyone.

If you've gotten this newsletter by accident, simply drop me an email and I'll remove you from the mailing list.

Conversely, if you know any mystery fans, horror fans, or writers who might enjoy this newsletter, feel free to send it their way.

WHISKEY SOUR by Joe Konrath
Coming in hardcover, Spring 2004, from Hyperion
www.joekonrath.com

STRAIGHT UP

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF AUTHOR J.A. KONRATH

AUGUST 20, 2003 VOL 1, NO 2

JACK DANIELS ON AUDIO!

Welcome to the second issue of the Joe Konrath newsletter. You're on this mailing list for one of these reasons:

a) You know me.

b) You signed up for this.

c) I blackmailed one of your friends to get your email address. (THANKS AGAIN, AND YOU HAVE MY WORD THAT I DESTROYED THE PHOTOS.)

This just in: Michael Bourret, who works for my wonderful literary agency Dystel & Goderich, has sold the first three books in my Lt. Jack Daniels series to the fine folks at Brilliance Audio.

The audio versions will be released in conjunction with the novels. The first, Whiskey Sour, will be available June of 2004.

Brilliance Audio is the nation's largest independent audio bookseller, and they've worked with big names like Tom Clancy and Stephen King. I'm sure they'll do their usual excellent job with my series.

Keep on eye on their site, www.brillianceaudio.com, for updates.

ORDER WHISKEY SOUR

I know —the novel isn't coming out for ten months. But the gang at Amazon.com have already begun taking preorders. Best of all, Amazon has the novel available for a 30% discount. When was the last time you bought a hardcover new release for only $16.77?

You can do an Amazon search on "J.A. Konrath" or "Whiskey Sour" to find the book. There's also a link to the Amazon order page on my website (www.jakonrath.com).

CAN'T STOP THE BLURBS

I've been extremely fortunate to have had over a dozen fine authors, many of them bestsellers and award winners, say nice things about Whiskey Sour. Here's a small sampling:

Michael Prescott "Everything about Whiskey Sour is smart - smart characters, smart writing, and a smart pace that keeps you reading long after you'd meant to turn out the lights."

Ridley Pearson "A dash of sardonic wit, two jiggers of the colorful Jack Daniels, and the icy, sharpened prose of Joe Konrath, all combine to make Whiskey Sour a literary cocktail that'll knock you off your chair."

Jay Bonansinga "I can't wait until the next fix!"

Warren B. Murphy "Joe Konrath's Whiskey Sour is the best mystery series debut I've read in years!"

Andrew Vachss "Whiskey Sour is one potent cocktail: a police procedural dashed with romance, mixed with a shot of sharp-tongued commentary, and garnished with an acidic sprinkling of spoof."

F. Paul Wilson "A fast, fun read!"

Robert W. Walker "I can honestly say that I have seen the future of suspense thrillers, and it is Joe Konrath..."

To read the complete quotes, along with blurbs by Libby Fisher Hellman, George C. Chesboro, Steven Spruill, Rob Kantner, David Wiltse, and others, go to my homepage at www.jakonrath.com.

While you're there, please check out my brand new message board, and let me know what you think of the Whiskey Sour jacket art. I just received it from Hyperion last week, and I'm very pleased.

I wanted my first novel to be the perfect beach read; funny, exciting, scary, sexy, with compelling characters and a breakneck pace. I think this cover wonderfully portrays my intent.

Finicky Eater

My horror short story, Finicky Eater, is now available in the highly respected genre magazine HORROR GARAGE #7. If you're a fan of dark fiction, pick up your very own copy at www.horrorgarage.com, or check out your local Tower Records, or Border's Books and Music.

I also have a few lying around; feel free to contact me at haknort@comcast.net if you'd like an autographed copy.

1ST SHORT STORY CONTEST

The results are in, and the winner of my First Short Story contest is Derrick Rushlo.

Derrick's tale, "Sleepless," beat out several dozen other competitors to take first prize.

He won a collection of autographed stuff, a trophy, and the unabashed admiration of his peers.

Plus, he'll have a character named after him in my next book, BLOODY MARY, coming out in 2005. Great job, Derrick.

Second place went to Sean Hicks, and Chris Lynch nailed the third place prize. Thanks again to everyone who entered.

My Second Short Story Contest is now running, and the winner will receive all of the above, plus some cold, hard CASH.

Check out my website for more details.

Where I'll Be

There will be plenty of opportunities to catch up with me in the upcoming months.

Why bother, you ask? Well, whenever I'm out in public, I pass out free stuff. Plus, anytime someone engages me in a conversation about writing, I buy them beer. Try to get Dean Koontz to do that!

October 13-Schaumburg Library at 7:00 PM (www.stdl.org). I'll be doing a three hour writing workshop with Rob Walker (www.robertwwalker.com). This is free, but space is limited, so arrive early.

October 16-20-BoucherCon in Las Vegas.

October 24-26-Magna Cum Murder Mystery Conference in Muncie, Indiana.

Also in October, I begin teaching at the College of Dupage in Glen Ellyn, IL. You can sign up for my eight week writing and marketing class (class code 15990), or my one day seminar on how to land a literary agent (class code 15948).

Contact me, or www.cod.edu, for more info.

This is adult education, and you don't have to be enrolled in the college to take my classes. Everyone is welcome, and there will be special celebrity guest speakers for both courses.

Love is Murder

I'm helping organize the Fifth Annual Love is Murder Mystery Writer's Conference, happening at the O'Hare Radisson in Chicago, Feb 6-8 of 2004.

It promises to be one of the biggest and best conventions in the Midwest. Keep an eye on www.loveismurder.com, for news and updates.

There are going to be some big name authors in attendance, and you won't want to miss it. If you're an author, and would like to do a reading or get on a panel or two, contact me.

More coming in my next newsletter, January of 2004. Feel free to drop me an email before then; I'm chained to my computer, and not going anywhere.

Best,

Joe

The Joe Konrath Newsletter never ever sells, gives away, or otherwise compromises the email addresses of its subscribers, nor does it intentionally spam anyone.

If you've gotten this newsletter by accident, simply drop me an email with REMOVE in the heading and I'll take you off the mailing list.

Conversely, if you know any mystery fans, horror fans, or writers who might enjoy this newsletter, feel free to send it their way.

WHISKEY SOUR by J.A. Konrath
Coming in hardcover, Spring 2004, from Hyperion
www.jakonrath.com

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–Welcome (who is this J.A. guy?)
–Writing Contest (win cash, prizes, and immortality)
–Bookstore and Library Contests (be in J.A.'s next book)
–Free "How to Get Published" booklet (yes, it's free)
–Recent News (sales, events, blurbs, etc.)
–Freebies (for newsletter subscribers)
–Whiskey Sour (read the first chapter for free)

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WELCOME
****

You received this because you love books. I love them, too. This infrequent (three times a year) email newsletter is my way of reaching out to readers, librarians, bookstore employees, and fellow authors.

My name is Joe, and I'm a mystery writer. After many years of struggling to get into print, I landed a three-book, six-figure deal with a large publisher. My first novel is being released in hardcover this June, by Hyperion. It's called Whiskey Sour, and introduces Violent Crimes Lieutenant Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels of the Chicago Police Department.

For more about me, and Jack, visit my homepage at www.JAKONRATH.com .

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WRITING CONTEST
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I want to help new writers, and the quickest way to connect with them is to hold a contest.

My previous contest ended February 29th. The first place winner was Noel Penaflor, for his story "Confession of an Amateur Killer." Second place went to Dan Rogers, and third to Patrick Lambe. I received a lot of submissions, and many of them were excellent. Thanks to all who entered.

My new writing contest has already begun. The rules are simple:
1) Stories must be unpublished and less than 3500 words.
2) Stories must be in the mystery/thriller genre.
3) Stories must be typed, double-spaced, and sent to me in the body of an email (no attachments)4) All entries must be received by October 31, 2004, only one submission per person.

I'll personally read all the entries, and try to offer editing advice when I can. The winner will receive:
– A signed hardcover copy of Whiskey Sour.
– Their name as a character in my third book, Rusty Nail.
– My help in submitting their story to a paying market. I'll assist the winner in writing a query letter, and lend my name and endorsement to their cause.
– $50 in cold, impersonal cash.

Second and third place winners will also receive undisclosed prizes (undisclosed because I have to think of something to give.)

****
BOOKSTORE & LIBRARY CONTESTS
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I love bookstores and libraries! Booksellers and librarians are some of the brightest and friendliest people on the planet (and I'm not just saying that because I worked in a bookstore for several years).

Because I intimately understand the importance of you folks, I'm holding some contests to show my appreciation for the work you're doing.

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CONTEST #1
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I want to know what you think of Whiskey Sour. If you are a bookstore owner or employee, or you work in a library, email me your thoughts about my novel. Here's how:

Step 1: Order a copy of Whiskey Sour for your library or bookstore (ISBN 1-4013-0087-1)
Step 2: Email me at haknort@comcast.net, and let me know what you (or your patrons) think of the book, in three sentences or less.
Step 3: I'll post these critiques on a special page of my website. Website visitors will be able to vote on which bookstore and library critique they like the best.
Step 4: On Dec 31st, 2004, the bookstore entry and the library entry with the most votes will each have a supporting character named after them in my third novel, Rusty Nail.

****
CONTEST #2
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I'll be touring the Midwest during the summer and fall of 2004, and would love to visit you! I'll be covering most of Illinois, Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan.

If you are a bookstore or a library in one of these states, contact me and I'll do my best to make an appearance.
The venue that draws the biggest crowd will have their store or library mentioned by name in Rusty Nail.

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HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

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Since signing my deal, I've had many pre-published authors contact me, asking how I did it. So many, in fact, that I decided to write a booklet detailing everything I know about breaking into print.

The booklet is called "How to Find an Agent and $ell Your Writing." It's 28 pages long, and filled with tips, tricks, and strategies you won't find in any other how-to book.

It's also available absolutely free as a download at www.JAKONRATH.com. Since putting the booklet on my website five months ago, over two thousand copies have been downloaded. I'd like to break the ten thousand mark by the end of the year, so feel free to spread the word.

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RECENT NEWS

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– I've teamed up with the wonderful folks at Brilliance Audio for a special treat. We've decided to include a cool extra on the unabridged audiobook release of Whiskey Sour. As a companion piece to the novel (read by the award-winning Dick Hill and Susie Breck), Brilliance will include an extra, stand-alone short story, featuring the serial killer villain from my novel. This story will be read by the author (me). And it's a scary one...

– In the next few months, I'll have stories and articles appearing in several places, including Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Writer's Digest, Cemetery Dance, Futures Mysterious Anthology Magazine, and the print collections "Spooks" by Twilight Tales, "Cold Flesh" by Hellbound Books, and "The Many Faces of Van Helsing" edited by Jeanne Cavelos and coming from Ace books this April. If you're a J.A. Konrath completist (hi, Mom!), check my website hourly to find out when and where all of the above will be released.

– Bungeishunju has purchased the Japanese rights to Whiskey Sour, and Librairie des Champs-Elysées will release the novel in France.

– In conjunction with the print and audio versions of the book, Whiskey Sour is also being released in a variety of e-book formats. Warm up your Palms, technophiles.

– I continue to teach writing and marketing at the College of Dupage in Glen Ellyn, Illinois. For info visit my site or go to www.cod.edu.

– The second Jack Daniels thriller, Bloody Mary, is finished, and I'm pretty excited about it. The bad guy is a raging psychotic, Jack's ex-husband returns, there are some fun twists, and the ending is a real roller coaster.

– My homepage, www.jakonrath.com, is growing larger by the day. Along with downloads, writing tips, pictures, excerpts, news, blurbs, character profiles, interviews, contests, message boards, and jokes, I also add a free short story every few weeks. Stop by and let me know what you think.

– Bestselling author Eric Garcia (Matchstick Men) has this to say about my novel: "Upon finishing Whiskey Sour, I immediately wanted more; I guess I'm just hooked on Lt. Jack Daniels, the freshest new

cop on the beat. Konrath is Hiaasen with teeth, Elmore Leonard by way of a dark alley. By turns horrifying and hilarious, Whiskey Sour is one sweet read."

– Bestselling author Barry Eisler (Rain Fall) says: "J.A. Konrath's touch is so deft that it's amazing to think that Whiskey Sour is only his first novel. This is a fast, funny, furiously entertaining debut, and I hope J.A. plans on keeping his smart, sardonic, and, at 45, sexy-as-hell heroine around for a long, long time. Whiskey Sour rocks!"

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FREEBIES

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Free stuff is cool. Several times a year I have a random drawing for free J.A. Konrath merchandise, and everyone on my mailing list is eligible. This morning, two newsletter subscribers were randomly picked (by my wife) to receive some cool gifts.
The lucky winners are:

Bob Jurczyk and Annette Taylor!

Congrats, Bob and Annette! Email me so I can mail out your prizes. The first one to email gets the choice of a Whiskey Sour T-Shirt (white, XL), or an advance reading copy of the book. The second one gets whatever the first one doesn't want.

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WHISKEY SOUR

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So what's Whiskey Sour about, anyway?

Whiskey Sour is the first book in a new thriller series featuring a female cop who chases serial killers. It will be released in hardcover, June 2nd, by Hyperion books. It's a cross between the laugh out loud antics of Dave Barry, and the nail-biting tension of James Patterson. Here's the inner jacket copy:
Lieutenant Jacqueline Daniels is having a bad week. Her live-in boyfriend has left her for his personal trainer, chronic insomnia has caused her to max out her credit cards with late-night home shopping purchases, and a frightening killer who calls himself "The Gingerbread Man" is dumping mutilated bodies in her district.

Between avoiding the FBI and their moronic profiling computer, joining a dating service, mixing it up with street thugs, and parrying the advances of an uncouth P.I., Jack and her binge-eating partner, Herb, must catch the maniac before he kills again… and Jack is next on his murder list.

Whiskey Sour, the first novel in the Lt. Jack Daniels series, cleverly combines laugh-out-loud humor and edge-of-your-seat suspense. Jack is a fun, fully drawn heroine in the grand tradition of Kinsey Millhone, Stephanie Plum, and Kay Scarpetta —and the cast of oddball characters surrounding her are worthy of an Elmore Leonard novel.

And on the back jacket:

"Whiskey Sour is a literary cocktail that will knock you off your chair."–Ridley Pearson
"Laugh-aloud humor. A fast, fun read."–F. Paul Wilson
"The best mystery series debut I've read in years. This book has it all."–Warren B. Murphy
"A fresh, frightening new voice."–David Wiltse
"A compulsive page-turner."–George C. Chesboro
"Smart characters, smart writing, and a smart pace that keeps you reading."–Michael Prescott
"One potent cocktail."–Andrew Vachss
"Detective fiction at it's finest!"–Rick Hautala
"One hell of a ride!"–Rob Kantner
"I can honestly say that I have seen the future of suspense thrillers, and it is J.A. Konrath." –Robert W. Walker
"Finally–a heroine for the rest of us!"–Libby Hellmann
"I can't wait for the next fix!"–Jay Bonansinga
"Thriller lovers rejoice!"–Steven Spruill
"I love J.A. Konrath so much, I married him!"–Maria Konrath

To read the first chapter of WHISKEY SOUR for free, surf on over to my homepage, www.JAKONRATH.com .

That about wraps it up for this issue. Newsletter Number 4 will be e-mailed at end of May. Feel free to drop me a line before then; I'm chained to my computer, and not going anywhere.

best,
J.A.

If you wish to be removed from this list, simply reply to this email with REMOVE in the header.

Straight Up-The Official Newsletter of Author J.A. Konrath #4

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—WRITING CONTEST WINNER
—BOOKSTORE CONTESTS WINNERS
—LIBRARY CONTEST
—LOVE IS MURDER (MYSTERY CONFERENCE INFO)
—LEFT COAST CRIME & SLEUTHFEST (MORE CONFERENCES)
—RECENT NEWS (SALES, EVENTS, ETC.)
—FREEBIES (FOR NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIBERS)
—CALL ALL REVIEWERS
—PARTING WORDS

WELCOME

Happy New Year! You're on this mailing list because you love books. I love them, too. This email is my way of reaching out to readers, librarians, bookstore employees, and fellow authors. If you want to be taken off this list, just reply with REMOVE in the header.

My thriller novel WHISKEY SOUR is the first in a new series featuring Lt. Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels of the Chicago Police Department. BookPage says it's "Easily one of the best debut suspense novels in recent years." It's available at bookstores everywhere in hardcover and on audio.

For more about Jack and the book, visit www.jakonrath.com. Now let's get to the fun stuff:

WRITING CONTEST WINNER!

I received over a hundred entries, which was great, but it took me much longer than expected to read them all. I was overwhelmed by the high quality of the submissions, which made it tough to choose the winner. After weeks of excruciating deliberation, I finally went with the quirkiest entry I received. The fifty dollar prize goes to Mike Mayer for his story "Boundary Line," a gripping tale of a kidnapping gone horribly wrong.

Congrats Mike! Along with fifty bucks, he gets a signed book, and I'll name a character after him in an upcoming novel. Second place goes to Jim Roberts, and third to Bob Farley —they also get signed books.

I struggled to judge this, because so many stories were great. Though there were too many entries to comment on individually, but if you submitted a story and have any questions about it, feel free to contact me.

BOOKSTORE CONTESTS

I love bookstores! Booksellers are some of the brightest, friendliest, and greatest people on the planet (and I'm not just saying that because I worked in a bookstore for several years).

I intimately understand the importance of booksellers, so I held three contests to show my appreciation for the work they're doing.

CONTEST #1

Every bookstore owner or employee who sells more than twenty (20) copies of WHISKEY SOUR will get their name in the acknowledgments for the second book in the Lt. Jack Daniels series, BLOODY MARY, scheduled for release in July.

Email me at haknort@comcast.net and let me know how many you've sold. So far eight booksellers have made the list. There's still room for more.

CONTEST #2

Has ended! Whoever sold the most copies of WHISKEY SOUR was going to have a character named after them in RUSTY NAIL, the third book in the Lt. Jack Daniels series. The winner is Steve Jensen, who has sold a whopping 256 copies. I may also be naming my next child after Steve...

CONTEST #3

Has ended! This contest was for the bookstore that drew the biggest crowd during my 2004 tour. The winner was Schuler's Books in Michigan, and the person who set the wheels in motion to get me there was Holly Frakes. Holly will have a major character named after her in RUSTY NAIL,Thanks, Holly!

LIBRARY CONTEST

I spent most of my youth in the library, and it was time well spent (am I the only one who misses the old card catalog?) So this contest is for *Librarians Only*. Here's how you play:

Step 1: Order a copy of Whiskey Sour for your library (ISBN 1-4013-0087-1)
Step 2: Email me at haknort@comcast.net, and let me know what you (or your patrons) think of the book, in three sentences or less.
Step 3: I'll post these critiques on a special page of my website, citing the librarian and the library.
Step 4: In June 2005, my wife will pick the quote she likes best, and the library will receive $200 worth of free books, including copies of BLOODY MARY.

LOVE IS MURDER

If you're a writer, book lover, mystery fan, or celebrity watcher, you need to check out the Sixth Annual Love is Murder Mystery Conference, happening February 4-6 in Chicago at the Rosemont O'Hare Wyndham

The three day con includes all meals, and you'll get to rub elbows with bestselling authors such as Anne Perry, Robert Walker, Barb D'Amato, Martin Greenberg, Raymond Benson, Jay Bonansinga, David Ellis, Barry Eisler, James Rollins, and many others, including me.

If you're a published author, there's still room on some panels. If you're a new writer, this is the place to get expert advice from pros, agents, and editors. If you're a mystery lover, this is Nirvana.

Check out www.loveismurder.com. Or call 847.891.6588 for more info. Tell them Joe sent you.

LEFT COAST CRIME and SLEUTHFEST

If the Midwest is too far for you to travel to have a beer with me, I'll also be attending two other conventions this winter. On February 24-27, I'll be at Left Coast Crime in El Paso, Texas. For more info go to www.leftcoastcrime2005.com Then from March 3-6 I'll be at Sleuthfest in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, www.sleuthfest.com. Hope to see some of you somewhere!

BLOODY MARY

The sequel to WHISKEY SOUR, called BLOODY MARY, is finished, and I'm ridiculously happy with it. Everyone who has read the book thinks it blows away Whiskey Sour, and the ending is sure to surprise even the most jaded suspense fan.

Jack's back, and she's chasing a maniac who would eat the Gingerbread Man for lunch... literally. Look for it from Hyperion Books and Brilliance Audio this July. It's funnier, scarier, sexier, and has zero carbohydrates.

Famous Pulitzer Prize winning author Dave Barry had this to say about BLOODY MARY: "I haven't actually read this book, but I can say that J.A. Konrath is an entertaining writer, based on the 53 emails he sent hounding me to write this blurb."

You can't buy an endorsement like that! (I know, because I tried.)

RECENT NEWS

– If you'd like to read the first few chapters of BLOODY MARY for free, here's how: Go visit www.HyperionSelect.com and check out the **Hyperion Select Online Book Club**, launching in January 2005, where you'll have the opportunity to sample excerpts from newly published books —like mine — and get sneak previews of what's coming up, as well as receive access to special offers such as Advance Reading Copies, author phone chats and promotional giveaways.

– For all of you on fixed incomes, or who dislike hardcovers because they take up too much shelf space, the paperback version of WHISKEY SOUR will be released at the end of June.

– Rights to Whiskey Sour have been sold to Russia. Perhaps I should change Jack's name to Smirnoff...

– My private eye ghost story REDUX can be found in the recent anthology SPOOKS, from Twilight Tales books, edited by Tina Jens and John Everson (www.twilighttales.com).

– Three humorous JA Konrath horror shorts can be found in SMALL BITES, an anthology edited by Garrett Peck and Keith Gouveia. All proceeds benefit ailing horror legend Charles Grant. You can pick up a copy at http://www.apfuchs.com/cgrantsmallbitesordering.html.

– FUTURES MYSTERIOUS ANTHOLOGY MAGAZINE (www.FMAM.biz) has published a humorous Harry McGlade mystery (Harry is the private eye from WHISKEY SOUR that used to be Jack's partner) in the latest issue, Winter 2004 #36. The story is called WHELP WANTED, and it's the funniest thing I've ever written.

– HORROR EXPRESS, a dark fiction magazine based in the UK, features a very nasty story of mine called BASKETCASE. Warning: it's graphic. Pick up the grue at http://www.horrorexpress.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/.

– I continue to teach writing and marketing at the College of Dupage in Glen Ellyn, Illinois. For info visit my site or go to www.cod.edu.

– Look for a hardboiled suspense tale from me in the March issue of ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE, called THE AGREEMENT, for sale very soon. I'll also have an upcoming article in WRITER'S DIGEST, a follow-up to AFTER THE BIG SALE.

– The third Jack Daniels thriller, RUSTY NAIL, is almost finished, and I'm pretty excited about it. Once again, Jack is up to her Armani in violent murder, and along for the ride are old friends like Phineas Troutt, Harry McGlade, Herb Benedict, and two very dense FBI agents. Look for it in 2006.

– My homepage, www.JAKonrath.com, has almost reached 25,000 hits, and I'd like to personally thank the three people who have visited my site 8000 times each. Along with downloads, writing tips, pictures, excerpts, news, blurbs, character profiles, interviews, contests, message boards, and jokes, I also add a free short story every other week —the newest is a One Minute Mystery called INSIDE JOB. Stop by and let me know what you think.

FREEBIES

Free stuff is cool. Many times a year I have a random drawing for free J.A. Konrath merchandise, and everyone on my mailing list is eligible. Two newsletter subscribers have been randomly picked to receive some cool gifts.

The lucky winners this time are: Carol Mintz and Linda Primmer.

Congrats! Email me at haknort@comcast.net so I can mail out your prizes; advanced reading copies of BLOODY MARY. Everyone else has to wait until July, but you lucky folks get the read it early (be sure to rub it in everyone's face.) Plus, you'll have two cop characters named after you in RUSTY NAIL.

REVIEWERS

Do you review books for a newspaper or a website? I have a few copies of BLOODY MARY available for reviewers. Email me and let me know who you review for, and maybe I can set you up with one.

And so ends another newsletter. Number 5 will be emailed end of May. Feel free to drop me an line before then; I'm chained to my computer, and not going anywhere.

Straight Up-The Official Newsletter of Author J.A. Konrath #5

In this issue:

—Book Launch Party!

—Contests Contests Contests

—Website Relaunch

—Recent News

—Freebies (for newsletter subscribers)

BOOK LAUNCH PARTY!

You're on this mailing list because you love books. I love them, too. This email is my way of reaching out to readers, librarians, bookstore employees, and fellow authors. If you want to be taken off this list, just reply with REMOVE in the header.

My second Lt. Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels thriller novel, BLOODY MARY, is being released in hardcover and on audio this June. The first novel in the series, WHISKEY SOUR, just came out in paperback. To celebrate, I'm going to buy beer for everyone I know.

The fun lasts from noon until 2pm at Damon's Grill on 1140 East Higgins Road, Schaumburg, IL 60173.

There will be liquor, food, raffles, give-aways, and plenty of books to buy. Then, afterwards, party at my house with even more beer.

If you're reading this, you're invited. Hope to see you there.

CONTESTS CONTESTS CONTESTS

Winning stuff is cool. Especially if you don't have to do a lot. Here are my current contests:

CONTEST #1 - Send me a picture of you holding a new, recently released paperback copy of WHISKEY SOUR, and I'll send you a free autographed hardcover of Bloody Mary, which you can keep or sell for big bucks on Ebay.

Am I insane? Nope... I just want to reward new readers. I have five copies to give away. The five most creative pics will win. So put fresh batteries in the digital camera, pick up WHISKEY SOUR at a store near you, and send me a snapshot at haknort@comcast.net.

CONTEST #2 - Calling all writers! Can you write a crime story in 500 words or less? If so, send it my way. The best story wins a cash prize of $50, plus their name as a character in my next book and a signed copy of BLOODY MARY.

Rules: Stories must involve a crime, and be less than 500 words (not including title and author name). They must be sent in the body of an email, with the header "500 Word Story Contest". One entry per person, the last day to submit is Oct 31, 2005, contest open to everyone except me, because that just wouldn't be very fair, would it?

Get writing!

CONTEST #3 - I spent most of my youth in the library, and it was time well spent (am I the only one who misses the old card catalog?) So this contest is for Librarians Only. Here's how you play:

Step 1: Order a copy of Whiskey Sour for your library (ISBN 1-4013-0087-1 in hardcover or 0-7868-9072-X in paperback)

Step 2: Email me at haknort@comcast.net, and let me know what you (or your patrons) think of the book, in three sentences or less.

Step 3: I'll post these critiques on a special page of my website, citing the librarian and the library.

Step 4: August 2005, my wife will pick the quote she likes best, and the library will receive $200 worth of free books, including copies of BLOODY MARY.

I've already received many entries for this contest, and they'll be posted soon.

CONTEST #4 - For Booksellers Only. This one is easy. In the acknowledgements of BLOODY MARY, I thanked many booksellers by name, because they sold twenty or more copies of my books.

If you sell twenty or more copies of my books, I'll happily thank you in the acknowledgements of RUSTY NAIL, which is coming out June of 2006. Just send me an email and let me know how many you've sold. And thanks for carrying my books!

WEBSITE RELAUNCH

I've completely redone my website. Besides the new look, there's also a lot of new content, including:

* Free Excerpts from Whiskey Sour and Bloody Mary

* More Writing Tips

* Marketing Tips for New Authors

* More Free Short Stories

* New Pictures and Interviews

* New Articles, including an uncut version of my Writer's Digest piece "After the Big Sale"

* New blog, called A Newbie's Guide to Publishing

* 2005 Tour Information (yes, I'm touring!)

* A Free Publicity Video (rated R for gratuitous violence and bad puppetry)

* And even more, probably.

Check out www.JAKonrath.com and let me know what you think.

RECENT NEWS

– Whiskey Sour won the Love is Murder People's Choice Award for Best First Novel (www.loveismurder.com). It was also nominated for a Gumshoe Award (www.mysteryinkonline.com) and an Anthony Award. The Anthony Award Banquet will be held at Bouchercon in Chicago this September. Check out www.bouchercon.net for details.

– I'm Toastmaster at the upcoming Backspace Writer's Conference (www.backspacewritersconference.com) being held June 2 in NYC. If you'd like to meet some famous authors, agents, and editors, this is the event to attend. It's almost full, so act fast.

– I'll be touring this summer, and will be signing at stores in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Arizona, California, Oregon, Washington, Colorado, and a few other places. Times and dates on my website.

– I'll be conducting two panels at the 23rd annual Dark and Stormy Nights convention in Schaumburg, IL on June 11 (www.ofdarkandstormynights.com). I'll also be at the Arlington Heights Library on June 16, the Schaumburg Library on June 25, and the Glenside Library on June 28.

– Recent sales to Ellery Queen (WITH A TWIST, a Jack Daniels story and SUFFER, a Phineas Troutt story), The Strand Magazine (TAKEN TO THE CLEANERS, a Harry McGlade story), and Writer's Digest (AFTER THE BOOK COMES OUT), all seeing print sometime this year.

– Available now or very soon are the Requiem for the Radioactive Monkeys anthology which features my story APPALACHIAN LULLABY, Surreal Magazine #1 which features my story THE SHED, the Cold Flesh anthology which features my story THE BAG, the Spooks anthology which features my story REDUX, and Horror Express #3 which features my story BASKETCASE. I also won a Derringer Award for my flash fiction story THE BIG GUYS, which appeared in the Small Bites anthology. Details and links on JAKonrath.com.

– Once again I visited Brilliance, my audio publisher, and was able to record a few tracks. The talented duo of Dick Hill and Susie Breck, who did such a great job reading WHISKEY SOUR, do an even better job with BLOODY MARY, which is available on cassette, CD, and MP3. I had a chance to play a character, and also read the Harry McGlade short story WHELP WANTED at the end of the book as a bonus.

– My friend Rob Kantner's new book, TROUBLE IS WHAT I DO: COLLECTED BEN PERKINS STORIES is being released in September (www.RobKantner.com). I was fortunate enough to write the foreword. I was equally fortunate to write a forward for the graphic novel SOMETHING TO BUILD UPON by Tim Broderick (oddjobs.keenspace.com/). Both books are wonderful, and should be read by everyone.

FREEBIES

Free stuff is cool. Many times a year I have a random drawing for free J.A. Konrath merchandise, and everyone on my mailing list is eligible. Two newsletter subscribers have been randomly picked to receive some cool gifts.

The lucky winners this time are: Joan Noble Pinkham and Tracey Hotham.

Congrats! Email me at haknort@comcast.net so I can mail out your prizes; signed copies of Bloody Mary and Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine featuring my story THE AGREEMENT. You'll also have characters named after you in DIRTY MARTINI, the fourth Jack Daniels book.

While the Jack Daniels series are mystery thrillers, I've also written several science thrillers. One of them is called ORIGIN, which is a cross between Jurassic Park and The Exorcist.

1906-Something is discovered by workers digging the Panama Canal. Something dormant. Sinister. Very much alive.

2005-Project Samhain. A secret underground government installation begun 99 years ago in New Mexico. The best minds in the world have been recruited to study the most amazing discovery in the history of mankind. But the century of peaceful research is about to end.

BECAUSE THE THING JUST WOKE UP.

The thing is nine feet tall, dark red, has bat wings and huge teeth, eats live sheep, and calls itself Beelzebub.

I've made ORIGIN available on my website as an E-book download. It comes in a variety of formats for desktop, laptop, and tablet PCs, e-book readers, and PDAs. Or, if you prefer, you can print a copy. Best of all, it's absolutely 100% FREE. Go to http://www.jakonrath.com/record.html to get your copy. Please spread the word.

And so ends another newsletter. Number 6 will be emailed end of August. Feel free to drop me a line before then; I'm chained to my computer, and not going anywhere.

JA Konrath

http://www.JAKonrath.com

Newsletter #6

Do newsletters work? If you're an author, what should you include in your newsletter? How many should you send out a year?

I talk about the value and importance of newsletters on the Tips page of my website. But here's a quick course:

- Don't intentionally spam.
- Use a bulk emailer to organize addresses and opt-outs. I use www.ymlp.com.
- Focus on what you have to offer, not what you have to sell.
- Don't be boring. Be funny. Be informative. Be quick.
- Make sure the layout is okay. Many people don't accept HTML, so I stick to plain text.
- Don't send more than four newsletters out a year —it's annoying, and nothing you're doing in your career is that important.

Here's my latest newsletter, for those of you who haven't gotten a copy:

Straight Up-The Official Newsletter of Author J.A. Konrath #6

In this issue:
—Introduction
—Contests and Winners
—Thriller: An Anthology
—The "Rusty Nail 500" Bookstore Summer Tour (aka "Will JA Survive?")
—Recent News
—Freebies (read until the end for free stuff!)

—INTRODUCTION

You're on this mailing list because you love books. I love them, too. This email is my way of reaching out to you readers, librarians, bookstore employees, fellow authors, and giving you free stuff. If you want to be taken off this list, just reply with REMOVE in the header or opt out using the link at the bottom.

My third Lt. Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels thriller novel, RUSTY NAIL, is being released in hardcover and on audio this July. The first two novels in the series, WHISKEY SOUR and BLOODY MARY, are currently available in paperback, hardcover, and on audio. They'll make you laugh, and then scare your socks off. Please head to your favorite bookstore and buy fifteen copies for yourself and everyone you know.

Now let's get to the free stuff:

—CONTESTS AND WINNERS

Winning stuff is cool. Especially if you don't have to do a lot. Here are my current contests:

CONTEST #1 - THE GREAT JACK DANIELS BLOG EXPERIMENT.

Lots of people have blogs these days. I have one called A NEWBIE'S GUIDE TO PUBLISHING at http://jakonrath.blogspot.com.

If you have a blog, use it to write a review of WHISKEY SOUR or BLOODY MARY, send me the link, and I'll send you a free signed copy of RUSTY NAIL. How easy is that?

You can also write a review of RUSTY NAIL, and I'll send you a signed copy of something else. I'm easy that way.

CONTEST #2 - CALLING ALL WRITERS!

Can you write a crime story in 500 words or less? If so, send it my way. The best story wins a cash prize of $100, plus their name as a character in my next book. They'll also win a signed copy of RUSTY NAIL ("Violent thrills peppered with hilarious one-liners!" - Publishers Weekly).

Rules: Stories must be less than 500 words (not including title and author name) and involve a murder. It must be sent in the body of an email, with the header "500 Word Story Contest". One entry per person, the last day to submit is Oct 31, 2006, contest open to everyone except me, because that just wouldn't be very fair, would it?

Get writing!

CONTEST #3 - FOR BOOKSELLERS ONLY.

This one is simple. In the acknowledgements of RUSTY NAIL I thank close to a hundred booksellers by name, because they each sold twenty or more copies of my books.

If you sell twenty or more copies of my books, I'll happily thank you in the acknowledgements of DIRTY MARTINI, which is coming out June of 2007. Just send me an email and let me know how many you've sold. The bookseller who sells the most will have the villain in FUZZY NAVEL named after them.

Several characters in my books, including Steve Jensen, Holly Frakes, James Munchel, and Steve Jurczyk, are named after booksellers, and I want you to be next. Thanks for all of your hard work and effort! I love you folks! Booksellers rule!

CONTEST #4 - FOR LIBRARIANS ONLY.

I've had over a hundred entries so far, but I want more. Go to my website and click on the link that says FOR LIBRARIES. That will automatically enter you in the contest. In November, I'll put all the names in a hat and will pick a random library. This lucky library will win a free visit from me, where I'll do a talk,

give you lots of free books, and also give everyone who shows up to see me a free book. If you want me to drop by and shower your library and your patrons with gifts, visit www.JAKonrath.com.

—THRILLER edited by James Patterson

This is the biggest anthology of all time, featuring an all-star line-up of bestselling authors including Lee Child, James Rollins, Katherine Neville, David Morrell, Michael Palmer, MJ Rose, F. Paul Wilson, Gregg Hurwitz, Steve Berry, and a slew of others. It also contains a Jack Daniels tie-in story called EPITAPH, written by me.

Visit www.thrillerbook.com for more info, then run out and buy copies for everyone you know.

—THE RUSTY NAIL 500 - WILL JA SURVIVE?

I'm dropping in 500 bookstores this summer, signing stock and passing out coasters and telling booksellers how much I love them. This is a driving tour, and I'll be visiting at least 25 different states during 70 days on the road.

If you're a bookstore employee, and want me to stop in and say hello, email me at haknort@comcast.net and I'll be able to tell you when I'll possibly be in your area.

If you've already contacted me, you'll be hearing from me very soon, as I'm finally beginning to set times and dates.

If you think I'm crazy and won't make it, keep an eye on my blog and website. I'll be posting daily updates about who I meet and where I visit, beginning July 3rd. Gambling on my success or failure will be encouraged. Meeting me somewhere on the road and buying me a beer will also be encouraged.

—RECENT NEWS

**If you've never read any Jack Daniels, here's your chance to try her out for only 49 cents!

Amazon.com has a new program where you can purchase short stories for pocket change.

My contribution, A FOUR PACK OF JACK, features four Jack Daniels tie-in stories, and you get all four for the super-low cost of super-sizing your French fries. You'll laugh. You'll cry. You'll freak out. And you just might learn something. But probably not.

Visit:

http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B000E4FIJ0/ref=dp_shrt_new_0/104-2700618-1743948?%5Fencoding=UTF8

Or if that URL is too long and unwieldy, go to www.JAKonrath.com and click on the link on my homepage.

**I edited an anthology called THESE GUNS FOR HIRE, which is debuting this year at Bouchercon in Madison. It's published by the gurus at Bleak House Books. THESE GUNS features 31 hit-man stories by some of the best writers in the biz, including:

David Morrell, William Kent Krueger, Raymond Benson, Ken Bruen, Jay Bonansinga, Jeff Strand, Libby Fischer Hellmann, Jeff Abbott, Jeremiah Healy, David Ellis, Sean Doolittle, Brian Wiprud, Michael A. Black, Lawrence Block, Reed Farrel Coleman, MJ Rose,Max Allan Collins, Ed Gorman, John Galligan, Victor Gischler, Julie A. Hyzy, Mitchell Graham, Rob Kantner, Benjamin Leroy, PJ Parrish, Monica J. O'Rourke, Marcus Sakey, Paul A. Toth, Robert W. Walker, Lisa Mannetti, and me.

It's an amazing anthology. Visit www.thesegunsforhire.com for a sneak peek.
**Bloody Mary won the Love is Murder People's Choice Award for Best Novel in a series. (www.loveismurder.net). I also won an Ellery Queen Reader's Choice Award for the Lt. Jack Daniels story WITH A TWIST. Speaking of EQMM, there's a Jack Daniels tie-in story in the recent June issue called SUFFER. Buy a bunch for those you love.

**I'm Toastmaster at the upcoming Backspace Writer's Conference (www.backspacewritersconference.com) being held July 21-22 in NYC. If you'd like to meet some famous authors, agents, and editors, this is the event to attend. It's almost full, so act fast.

**I recently visited Brilliance, my audio publisher, and was able to record a few tracks for RUSTY NAIL. The talented duo of Dick Hill and Susie Breck, who did such a great job reading WHISKEY SOUR and BLOODY MARY, again provide the voices for the latest, which is available on cassette, CD, and MP3. I had a chance to voice a character, and also read my story THE DEATH OF JACK DANIELS, which is exclusive to the audiobook.

—FREEBIES

Free stuff is cool. A few times a year I have a random drawing for free J.A. Konrath merchandise, and everyone on my mailing list is eligible. Two newsletter subscribers have been randomly picked to receive some cool gifts.

The lucky winners this time are: Val Stark and Shanna Arnold.

Congrats! Email me at haknort@comcast.net so I can send you signed copies of RUSTY NAIL. You'll also have characters named after you in FUZZY NAVEL, the fifth Jack Daniels book. Probably corpses. :)

Also, since I want to reward people who read this entire newsletter, the first ten people who email me will get a free advance reading copy of THESE GUNS FOR HIRE.

Remember: JA loves you. Do any other authors profess their love for you? Does Dan Brown? Does Patricia Cornwell? Nope. But I do. And I'm not just saying that to get you to buy my books. I love you for who you are.

You're special. Never forget that.

See you on the road this summer!

JA Konrath
www.JAKonrath.com
www.jakonrath.blogspot.com

17 comments

Newsletter #7

Straight Up - The Official Newsletter of Author J.A. Konrath #7

In this issue:
—Introduction
—Book Launch Party
—The Dirty Martini Tour
—Bookseller Contest
—Reviewer Contest
—Writing Contest Winners
—Library Contest Winner
—Free Whiskey Sours
—MySpace
—Books for Troops
—Recent News
—Summer Reads
—Freebies

—INTRODUCTION

You're on this mailing list because you love books. I love them, too. This email is my way of reaching out to readers, librarians, bookstore employees, fellow authors, and giving you free stuff. If you want to be taken off this list, just reply with REMOVE in the header or opt out using the link at the bottom. If you've asked to be removed from this newsletter and haven't been, I apologize —my current address book got corrupted and I had to rebuild it using an older file. Sorry —won't happen again. If you've signed up for this newsletter and haven't received it, you probably aren't reading this, but I apologize anyway.

My fourth Lt. Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels thriller novel, DIRTY MARTINI, has just been released in hardcover and on audio CD and MP3. It's gotten some terrific reviews, and unlike the previous books in the series, this one has very little violence in it. But rest assured, there's still alot of scares and suspense, as well as some big laughs. If you would like to read or listen to the first seven chapters for free, visit www.JAKonrath.com.

The first three novels in the series, WHISKEY SOUR, BLOODY MARY, and RUSTY NAIL, are currently available in paperback, hardcover, and on audio. They'll make you laugh, and then scare your socks off. Please head to your favorite bookstore and buy fifteen copies of each for yourself and everyone you know.

Now let's get to the fun stuff:

—BOOKLAUNCH PARTY

I'm having a booklaunch party for DIRTY MARTINI, on Thursday, July 26, from 8pm until 9:30pm.

After carefully considering many venues, and taking into account the tastes and needs of my close friends and fans, I've decided to hold the launch at Chuck E. Cheese, on 990 S. Barrington Rd, Streamwood Illinois. The first thirty people to buy books will also get free game tokens.

Yes, I'm serious.

There will be pizza, beer, wine, and pictures with Chuck E. Cheese the giant mouse. I encourage you to come by, say hello, and get a signed copy of any of my books. Everyone is invited, except for Al Gore, who I'm mad at for not returning my calls. I'm having a big Styrofoam bonfire at the party, Al. Then we're going to play "Improperly dispose of the used batteries" at a nearby pond. Then, Twister.

—THE DIRTY MARTINI TOUR

After visiting 29 states on tour last year, my lovely wife has threatened me with violence if I ever do that again. But I will still be dropping in stores in Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Indiana all summer, and there's also a good chance I'll visit stores on the West Coast, including Washington, Oregon, and California late summer/early fall. Keep an eye on my website for details. The only "official" signing I currently have planned is on July 25 at Mystery One in Milwaukee, where I'll be appearing alongside legal thriller author David Ellis. Hope to see you there.

—BOOKSELLER CONTEST

On the back of DIRTY MARTINI, instead of the standard quotes by reviewers and bigshot authors, I feature blurbs by booksellers. I love booksellers. In fact, I thank over 1300 booksellers by name in the acknowledgments of Dirty Martini. If you are a bookseller, I encourage you to write a quote of your own for Dirty Martini. Send it to me at haknort@comcast.net. I'll put it on my homepage, and name a character in my next book after the bookseller who sends me the coolest quote.

—REVIEWER CONTEST

I enjoy being reviewed, whether it's in a newspaper, a newsletter, a listserv, on a website, a blog, MySpace, a bulletin board, an online review site, a bookstore site, etc. Write a review of Dirty Martini, and put it someplace where people can read it, and you'll be thanked in the acknowledgments of FUZZY NAVEL, coming out next year. Simple as that. The first twenty reviewers will also get something free. I have several copies of DIRTY MARTINI on audio CD and MP3 (featuring another amazing vocal performance by Dick Hill and Susie Breck) plus various copies of anthologies I've been in. The freebies will be autographed, of course.

—WRITING CONTEST WINNERS

I apologize for taking so long to judge this contest. I wish I had time to personally respond to everyone who submitted a story, but I was overwhelmed by over five hundred entries. There are a lot of great writers out there!

After some torturous deliberation, I've selected one winner and five runner-ups. Each will get a signed hardcover book, and the winner will also get a hundred bucks, and my help with crafting a query letter.

The runner ups (in no particular order) are:

Al Bixby
Jonette Stabbert
Alan Peden
Steve Hagood
Richard M. Coad

And the overall winner is Dwayne L. Williamson, for his crime story, "Buried and Dead."

Thanks to all who entered!

If you didn't win, don't dwell on it. Rejection is part of being a writer. Remember, I collected almost 500 rejections before I sold a single word. Keep writing, keep trying, and never say die.

—LIBRARY CONTEST WINNER

After printing up over 400 entries and picking one at random, the winner is:

Denise Gullikson and the Andersen Library in Whitewater, Wisconsin.

Congrats, Denise! We'll coordinate a time for me to visit your library, give away some free books, and do a talk.

—FREE WHISKEY SOURS

Haven't read any of my books yet? Now you can, for free. WHISKEY SOUR, the first Jack Daniels book, is available as a free pdf file for a limited time on www.JAKonrath.com. My print publisher, Hyperion, is limiting the freebies to the first 1000 downloads, so act quickly. You can read the entire text of WHISKEY SOUR on your computer, or you can print it out, put it on your tablet PC, PDA, ebook reader, Palm Pilot, Blackberry, iPhone, etc. Be sure to tell all your friends, and drop me a line to let me know what you think of it.

—MYSPACE

Are we MySpace Best Friends Forever yet? Visit my page at www.MySpace.com/JAKonrath and join my 15,000 other BFFs, each of whom I know by name and stay in constant touch with because they are so very dear to me.

—BOOKS FOR TROOPS

Believe it or not, there's a JA Konrath Library in Iraq. A friend of mine is stationed there, and I put out a call to send him books for his fellow troops. They've gotten several hundred so far, but those were mostly by Nora Roberts. If you have some extra books lying around, send them to:

Soldiers of C Co / 163 MI Bn
c/o 1SG Hansen
COB Speicher
APO AE 09393

—RECENT NEWS

The anthology I edited, THESE GUNS FOR HIRE, just received some great news. Author Julie Hyzy won a well-deserved Derringer Award for her contribution, STRICTLY BUSINESS. The antho features hitman and assassin stories from many top thriller writers, and is a must-read for everyone who loves mysteries. Visit www.TheseGunsForHire.com for details.

My short story EPITAPH, which is a Jack Daniels tie-in, was recently nominated for a British Dagger Award. It appears in the anthology THRILLER edited by James Patterson, now available in paperback.

If you're looking for more Jack Daniels stories, there's one in the upcoming anthology CHICAGO BLUES edited by Libby Fischer Hellmann.

I have a fun essay about Janet Evanovich in the recently released PERFECTLY PLUM, edited by Leah Wilson.

My gross little horror story, Mr. Pull Ups, is now available in the anthology TALES FROM THE RED LION.

I recently returned from Rome, Naples, and Milan in Italy, hosted by my Italian publisher Alacran Edizioni. If you, or someone you know, reads Italian, pick up their gorgeous edition of Whiskey Sour at www.bol.it or www.ibs.it.

Whiskey Sour, I'm pleased to report, was just reprinted and is now in its third paperback edition. I'm thrilled by the support from Hyperion and from all of the fans who have embraced the book and the series.

—SUMMER READS

If you've read all four of the Jack Daniels books (thanks!) and are desperately looking for something good to read, I heartily recommend the following:

A POISONED SEASON by Tasha Alexander - I normally don't like historical fiction, but I love this series.

BIG CITY, BAD BLOOD by Sean Chercover - Great mystery debut.
BAD LUCK AND TROUBLE by Lee Child - Another awesome Jack Reacher novel.
REQUIEM FOR AN ASSASSIN by Barry Eisler - Eisler keeps getting better and better.
EYE OF THE BEHOLDER by David Ellis - An amazing serial killer novel.
THE MEPHISTO CLUB by Tess Gerritsen - Gerritsen's best yet.
SUPER MOM SAVES THE WORLD by Melanie Lynne Hauser - Funny and touching chick/mom lit.
SLEEPING WITH FEAR by Kay Hooper - Kay is wonderful.
CROSSHAIRS by Harry Hunsicker - Number three in one of my favorite new mystery series.
HELL'S BELLES by Jackie Kessler - Fun supernatural chick-lit.
SCAVENGER by David Morrell - An amazing follow up to CREEPERS.
A THOUSAND BONES by PJ Parrish - Awesome thriller.
THE MARK by Jason Pinter - Incredible debut.
THE JUDAS STRAIN by James Rollins - One of the best thriller authors out there.
THE REINCARNATIONIST by MJ Rose - MJ is always fantastic.
EVERY CROOKED POT by Renee Rosen - A heartfelt coming-of-age story.
THE BLADE ITSELF by Marcus Sakey - Great thriller debut.
ON THE ROPES by Tom Schreck - Great mystery debut.
PRESSURE by Jeff Strand - One of the scariest books I've ever read.
SERPENT'S KISS by Mark Terry - Great follow-up to DEVIL'S PITCHFORK.
SHADOWS IN THE WHITE CITY by Robert W. Walker - Walker's terrific sequel to CITY FOR RANSOM.

—FREEBIES

Free stuff is cool. A few times a year I have a random drawing for free J.A. Konrath merchandise, and everyone on my mailing list is eligible. Two newsletter subscribers have been randomly picked to receive some cool gifts.

The lucky winners this time are:

Lucky Andringa
Cynthia Paulino

Lucky and Cynthia, email me to get your gifts.

Remember, even if you didn't win, you can still get free stuff and also get mentioned in the acknowledgments of FUZZY NAVEL by writing a review of DIRTY MARTINI.

Keep an eye on JAKonrath.com for updates and news. Book #5, FUZZY NAVEL, is due out June 2008.

See you on the road!

JA Konrath
www.JAKonrath.com

www.JAKonrath.blogspot.com
www.MySpace.com/JAKonrath

6 comments

Summer Newsletter 2008

Straight Up - The Official Newsletter of Author J.A. Konrath #8

In this issue:
—Introduction
—Book Launch Party
—The Fuzzy Navel Tour
—Reviewer Contest
—Free E-Books
—MySpace
—Speaking Engagements
—Recent News
—Be AFRAID
—Jack Daniels Movie Update
—Freebies

—INTRODUCTION

You're on this mailing list because you love books. I love them too. This email is my way of reaching out to readers, librarians, bookstore employees, and fellow authors, and giving you free stuff. If you want to be taken off this list you can opt out using the link at the bottom. If you've asked to be removed from this newsletter and haven't been, I apologize. If you've signed up for this newsletter and haven't received it, you probably aren't reading this, but I apologize anyway.

My fifth Lt. Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels thriller novel, FUZZY NAVEL, will be released in hardcover and on audio CD and MP3 on July 8th. The first four novels in the series, WHISKEY SOUR, BLOODY MARY, RUSTY NAIL, and DIRTY MARTINI, are currently available in paperback, hardcover, and on audio. They'll make you laugh, and then scare your socks off. Please head to your favorite bookstore and buy eleven copies of each for yourself and everyone you know.

Now let's get to the fun stuff:

—BOOKLAUNCH PARTY

I love book parties, especially those that take place in snazzy venues where the food and liquor are free and there are plenty of cool people to talk to.

I'm not having one this year.
However, on the launch date for Fuzzy Navel, July 8th, you're all invited to my CEREBRAL BOOK LAUNCH PARTY!

Instead of a brick and mortar restaurant with an open bar, this party takes place entirely in my mind. There will be celebrities, big surprises, and everyone who attends will win $300 and a Toyota Prius. It's going on from 7pm-9pm, in my head. Please RSVP via telepathy. I hope to see you all there.

Then, after the party, go to a real store and buy my book.

—THE FUZZY NAVEL TOUR

I'll be visiting stores in Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Michigan. Keep an eye on www.JAKonrath.com for when and where.

—REVIEWER CONTEST

I love being reviewed, whether it's in a newspaper, a newsletter, a listserv, on a website, a blog, MySpace, a bulletin board, an online review site, a bookstore site, etc. People who wrote reviews of DIRTY MARTINI were thanked in the acknowledgements of FUZZY NAVEL. I'm doing the same thing for this book.

Write a review of FUZZY NAVEL and put it someplace where people can read it, and you'll be thanked in the acknowledgments of CHERRY BOMB, coming out next year. Simple as that. Email me a link to your review (if you've already reviewed it, please send me the link again) and you'll be entered in a contest.

Ten lucky winners, drawn at random, will receive free signed stuff. You'll have a choice of any of my previous or future books or anthologies.

One very lucky grand prize winner will get dinner. Yes, I'll actually buy you dinner. Drinks too. The only downside is that I'll be there with you.

So if you want free books, or you want to have me all to yourself for a few hours while I ply you with fine food and drink, then please review Fuzzy Navel.

Oh, and each different place you post the review online counts as a separate contest entry. So if you write one review and post it on your blog, your MySpace page, your Facebook page, Goodreads.com, Shelfari.com, Booksnbytes.com, Amazon.com, BN.com, Borders.com, DorthyL.com, and Yahoo Groups, then that's 11 entries, and 11 chances to win. How badly do you want to eat with me?

—FREE E-BOOKS

Haven't read any of my books yet? Now you can, for free. I have several full length novels and several dozen short stories available as free downloads on JAKonrath.com. Check them out, and keep an eye out for my new website design coming in July.

—MYSPACE

Are we MySpace Best Friends Forever yet? Visit my page at www.MySpace.com/JAKonrath and join my 15,000 other BFFs, each of whom I know by name and stay in constant touch with because they are so very dear to me. I also have a Facebook page, and you can befriend me there as well. Though, in all honesty, the best way to befriend me is by seeing me at a writing conference and handing me a beer.

—SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

Are you affiliated with a library, book club, writing group, university, book fair, conference, or convention and would love to have me come speak? Of course you would. And I would love to come. Email me with a request and we can discuss my outrageous fees and unreasonable demands.

—RECENT NEWS

Harry McGlade, Jack's ex-partner, is the star of two novellas. The first, SUCKERS, is co-written with cult horror author Jeff Strand. Jeff's series character Andrew Mayhem (star of three hilariously gruesome books) teams up with Harry, and the jokes fly fast and furious. It's limited to 300 hardcover copies, and a really funny book. Get it before it's gone forever.

Harry is also in LIKE A CHINESE TATTOO, an anthology edited by Bill Breedlove. This story, called THE NECRO FILE, is officially the silliest thing I've ever written. Both of these books are available at www.horror-mall.com. If you're a JA Konrath completist, a Harry McGlade fan, or just want to blow some money on stupid stuff, I encourage you to buy copies of each. But a warning: These aren't for the faint of heart.

I had the pleasure of collaborating with F. Paul Wilson on a story in the upcoming anthology BLOOD LITE, edited by Kevin J. Anderson. Look for it at bookstores everywhere this October.

DIRTY MARTINI was nominated for a Barry Award for best novel.

I wrote a funny werewolf novella for the anthology WOLFSBANE AND MISTLETOE, edited by Charlaine Harris and Toni L.P. Kelner. It's being released in October.

For those of you keeping tabs on what I eat for breakfast, this morning it was Frosted Mini Wheats. Yesterday, eggs and bacon. The day before, Mini Wheats. Tomorrow, I'm planning on Mini Wheats if any are left. If not, fried bologna.

I've collaborated with author Henry Perez on a novella featuring Jack Daniels and his character Alex Chapa (the main character from his upcoming thriller KILLING RED). The story, written for charity, is slated to appear in the upcoming Echelon Press release MISSING, which will debut at Bouchercon in Baltimore.

My blog, A NEWBIE'S GUIDE TO PUBLISHING (jakonrath.blogspot.com) was named one of the Top 101 Websites For Writers by Writer's Digest magazine.

JAKonrath.com is being overhauled with a new look and easier navigation, hopefully by the end of July. It will also include a message board, since I know all of my fans want to be able to interact with each other. All three of you. Expect another email from me when the website relaunches.

The biggest news of all came in the form of an email. Apparently a Nigerian prince has named me as an heir, and is going to deposit 16 million dollars into my bank account as soon as I send him the routing number. I plan on using the money to buy Nebraska, which I'll rename Joebraska and then have a rave party in the largest city, Joemaha. You're all invited.

—BE AFRAID

I've written a book under a pseudonym. It's called AFRAID, and I'm using the pen name Jack Kilborn. It will be available this year in Australia and Great Britain, and next year in the US. I tried my best to create the scariest novel of all time, and by early accounts I've succeeded. The website www.JackKilborn.com is coming soon.

—JACK DANIELS MOVIE UPDATE

Nothing to update, because no one has bought the rights. But if you've got fifty bucks, or even a case of good beer, call me and we'll talk.

—FREEBIES

Free stuff is cool. A few times a year I have a random drawing for free J.A. Konrath merchandise, and everyone on my mailing list is eligible. Five newsletter subscribers have been randomly picked to receive some cool gifts.

The lucky winners this time are:

lisa@tigerluna.com
knelson60@yahoo.com
rona.skene@btinternet.com
dl650@mac.com
kathyfranklin11@comcast.net

Email me to get your swag.

Thanks very much (your name here) for reading this far. Keep an eye on JAKonrath.com for updates and news. See you on the road!

11 comments

MySpace Bulletin #2

Wednesday, March 12, 2008
Limited Edition Pre-Order Available
Current mood: contemplative
Category: Writing and Poetry

Greetings all of my close and personal MySpace Friends who are more important to me than my family.

I hope you're doing well. Really. I'm sitting here and hoping it right now.

Since we're close Friends, you may know that I'm a writer. I do these funny/scary thrillers about a cop named Jack Daniels. All the books are named after drinks, like Whiskey Sour and Bloody Mary. They're funny, but scary, and available at a bookstore near you.

One of the characters in those books is a foul-mouthed private eye named Harry McGlade. I've gotten hate mail from people who can't stand him.

Well, he's now the star of his own book.

It's about vampires. And it's very funny, and kind of scary. Mostly, it's gory.

If you like horror fiction, and like to laugh, you'll get a kick out of it. It's like a combination of Stephen King and South Park mixed with that hot new band you like, the one you featured on your MySpace page. And it also cures diabetes.

It's called SUCKERS, and comes out May 6th. It's only a hundred pages long (great for those of you with attention deficit disorder) and it's waaaay overpriced.

But here's the cool thing: There are only 300 copies available.

When they're gone, they're gone forever.

Considering I have several hundred thousand books in print around the world, and considering I keep getting more and more popular, a signed and limited edition JA Konrath book could be worth some money some day.

Some serious money.

If you want to pre-order a copy, you can do so here:

https://www.horror-mall.com/SUCKERS-by-J.A.-Konrath-and-Jeff-Strand-p-17711.html

Yes, it will make you laugh. Sure, it will make you squirm. But mostly, it will make you very rich. One day, you'll be selling this book on eBay, and earn enough to put your kids through college.

I'm telling you the truth, because I'm your close and personal MySpace Friend. I care about your future. I really do.

BTW - A guy named Jeff Strand also wrote half the book (mostly the adjectives), but my financial people have assured me that won't hurt the resale value much.

love,

JA Konrath
The author who cares about you. Deeply.

7 Comments

MySpace Bulletin #3

Tuesday, April 01, 2008
Free Books! For Real!
Current mood: blissful

I just finished writing Jack Daniels 6 (Cherry Bomb, coming July '09 from Hyperion) so now it's time to get back into promotion mode.

To kick things off, I've got a lot of free stuff to give away.

If you want one of these free books, email me. But there's a catch.

If I send you something free, you have to review it somewhere.

Your blog. MySpace.com. Amazon.com. BN.com. Facebook.com. Goodreads.com. Or any other public internet forum.

Fair enough? Okay, here's what I've got for you:

FUZZY NAVEL ADVANCE READING COPIES

This is Jack's fifth adventure, coming out July 2008. It all takes place in an eight hour period. While Jack works a high-profile sniper case, someone from her past returns to kill her and everyone she cares about. The two stories converge in a knock-down, drag-out, free-for-all, which was a lot of fun for me to write.

I have ten copies. If you want one, and you love to plaster your reviews all over the Internet, drop me a line.

LIKE A CHINESE TATTOO

This is an anthology featuring Cullen Bunn, Rick R. Reed, David Thomas Lord, and me. My blurb on the back says, "JA Konrath's prose ranges from careless to wretched" - Kirkus.

I contributed three horror stories, one of which is a lengthy Harry McGlade novella.

Harry, as you may know, is a supporting character in the Jack books. He takes center stage here, with predictably gratuitous results.

This is one of the funniest, and most disgusting, things I've ever written.

If you love your horror books gross and laugh out loud, email me and tell me why I should give it to you. I only have one copy.

The rest of you should get your copies here:

https://www.horror-mall.com/LIKE-A-CHINESE-TATTOO-by-Cullen-Bunn-David-Thomas-Lord-JA-Konrath-Rick-R.-Reed-p-17713.html

The first edition printing is less than 300 copies, so act fast.

While you're at Horror Mall, you should also pick up my other Harry McGlade novella, **SUCKERS**, co-written with Jeff Strand. This is a signed, 100 page, limited edition hardcover. It's also gory, and funny, and very collectible. Buy yours here:

https://www.horror-mall.com/SUCKERS-by-J.A.-Konrath-and-Jeff-Strand-p-17711.html

DIRTY MARTINI

Want a free copy of the fourth Jack Daniels thriller?

If you buy a copy of the sci-fi horror anthology **GRATIA PLACENTI**, which featured my revolting little alien story THEM'S GOOD EATS, then you get a hardcover for free. First come, first serve. Go here for details:

http://apexdigest.livejournal.com/97381.html

WHISKEY SOUR

The first Jack Daniels adventure. If you can read Italian, I have 7 copies available in oversized trade paperback of the Italian edition by Alacran Edizioni. Email me if you, or someone you know, knows Italian.

If you can't read Italian, you can still get Whiskey Sour for free. It's available as a free pdf download for reading on your computer, Sony E-reader, Amazon Kindle, cell phone, iPod, etc.

WHISKEY SOUR is available as a free download here:

http://www.jakonrath.com/WhiskeySourFree.pdf

Do you want more free Jack Daniels, along with other short stories?

I've got 55 short stories available for free on my website. They're in a collection called **55 PROOF**, which features 13 Jack Daniels shorts and tie-ins, plus 42 other crime, horror, and humor stories.

I also have three full novels available as free downloads.

ORIGIN is a technothriller about a secret government compound where they're holding Satan. Mayhem ensues.

THE LIST is a cop thriller with a twist —the heroes and villains are modern day clones of famous historical figures. Mayhem ensues.

DISTURB is a horrific medical thriller, about a drug that replaces a full night of sleep. Mayhem ensues.

All of the above books are available for free here:

http://www.jakonrath.com/ebooks.html

Does James Patterson give you free stuff? Does Dean Koontz? Stephen King? Dan Brown?

I'm sure they do. But I love you more than they do.

SIGNED STUFF

I get several requests per week from people who want to know where they can buy signed copies of JA Konrath books.

I encourage you to seek me out at a signing event, which are posted on my website. The next one will be on April 5th at Barnes & Noble, 13 W. Rand Road, Arlington Heights, IL, from Noon until 3pm. I'd love to see you there.

If you can't make it, you can order signed copies of all of my books (including the ones mentioned above that are free downloads) here:

http://www.jakonrath.com/extrastore.html

As always, thanks for reading.

21 Comments

MySpace Bulletin #4

Tuesday, July 08, 2008
Plea For Help
Current mood: depressed

I didn't join MySpace to sell my books. I joined because I truly enjoy being friends with you.
In fact, you're my very favorite friend out of all of my 13,000 MySpace friends. You're easily the coolest person on MySpace and I'm honored to know you.
Unfortunately, I may not be your friend for much longer.
I don't want to cry on your shoulder, but since we're BFF, I feel I can unburden myself.
I was recently diagnosed with Book Writer's Disease, which I caught from a toilet seat.
It's almost always fatal. According to my doctor, I have about eighteen seconds to live.
The only thing that will save me is if you, my very best MySpace friend, immediately buy a copy of Fuzzy Navel, my fifth Jack Daniels thriller that releases today.
I know it sounds incredible, but this one act of kindness on your part will stop my dreaded disease. Plus, it's a really fun book, so you're saving my life while also having a good time.
I hate to put this sort of pressure on you, but the seventeen poor children from Peru I adopted yesterday need me to stay alive so I can pay for their operations. And if I die, the government will tear down my house, leaving no one to care for the three dozen sick kittens that I'm nursing back to health.
Also, if you don't buy the book, gas prices will hit $18.39 a gallon and the sun will die out. Plus, you could get scabies.
Sounds incredible, but it's all 100% true.
So please, please, buy Fuzzy Navel and save the planet.
Your BFF, JA Konrath

3 Comments

JA Konrath/Jack Kilborn Newsletter

Straight Up - The Official Newsletter of Author J.A. Konrath/Jack Kilborn

In this issue:
—Introduction
—Free Book
—SERIAL
—Floaters
—Free e-books
—Afraid
—Book Launch Party
—Summer Reads
—Freebies

—INTRODUCTION
You're on this mailing list because you love books. I love them, too. This email is my way of reaching out to readers, librarians, bookstore employees, and fellow authors, in order to give you free stuff. If you want to be taken off this list, you can opt out using the link at the bottom. If you've asked to be removed from this newsletter and haven't been, I apologize. If you've signed up for this newsletter and haven't received it, you probably aren't reading this, but I apologize anyway.

Now let's get to the fun stuff:

—FREE BOOK
FUZZY NAVEL, the fifth in the Jack Daniels series, was recently released in paperback. If you were too cheap to buy it in hardcover, this version is for you.

If you haven't read FUZZY NAVEL (or even if you have) and would like to review it on your blog, I'll give you a free signed copy of one of my other books.

Let me repeat that: Review FUZZY NAVEL and get a FREE SIGNED BOOK.

Along with the blog review, I'd like you to post your review at least one other place on the Internet. Some of the obvious choices are Goodreads.com, Shelfari.com, Booksnbytes.com, Amazon.com, Borders.com, BN.com, Librarything.com, Booksamillion.com, Yahoo groups, DorothyL.com, etc.

How do you enter?

1. Email me at haknort@wowway.com with the heading FUZZY REVIEW.

2. Include your snail mail address, the URL to the blog where you'll post the review, and tell me which review websites you'll post on.

That's all. Fifty people who follow those easy instructions will get free books. Perhaps even more than fifty, if the response is overwhelming.

How cool is that?

—SERIAL
This is an ebook horror novella available for free. Blake Crouch (author of ABANDON) and I turn our attention to the twin golden rules of hitchhiking:

1: Don't go hitchhiking, because the driver who picks you up could be certifiably crazy.

2: Don't pick up hitchhikers, because the traveler you pick up could be a certifiably crazy.

So what if, on some dark, isolated road, Crazy #1 offered a ride to Crazy #2?

When two of the most twisted minds in the world of horror fiction face off, the result is SERIAL, a terrifying tale of hitchhiking gone terribly wrong. Like a deeply twisted version of an "After School Special," SERIAL is the single most persuasive public service announcement on the hazards of free car rides.

Beyond a thrilling piece of horrifying suspense, SERIAL is also a groundbreaking experiment in literary collaboration. Kilborn wrote the first part. Crouch wrote the second. And they wrote the third together over email in 100-word exchanges, not aware of each other's opening section. All bets were off, and may the best psycho win.

A warning about SERIAL from the authors:

SERIAL is a 8000 word horror novella written by masters of the genre Blake Crouch and Jack Kilborn.

But just because it is 100% free doesn't mean you should automatically download it.

This is disturbing stuff. Perhaps too disturbing.

If you can handle horrific thrills, proceed at your own risk.

But if you suffer from anxiety attacks, nervous disorders, insomnia, nightmares or night terrors, heart palpitations, stomach problems, or are of an overly sensitive nature, you should read something else instead.

The authors are in no way responsible for any lost sleep, missed work, failed relationships, or difficulty in coping with life after you have read SERIAL. They will not pay for any therapy you may require as a result of reading SERIAL. They will not cradle you in their arms, rock you back and forth, and speak in soothing tones while you unsuccessfully try to forget SERIAL.

Yes, it's free. But free has its price.

You have been warned.

Download SERIAL at http://www.blakecrouch.com .

Incidentally, SERIAL has been the #1 download on Amazon Kindle for the past 17 days. :)

—FLOATERS
This is a novella I wrote with Henry Perez. In it, Jack Daniels joins forces with Henry's protagonist Alex Chapa (KILLING RED) to solve a bizarre murder.

It's free, and currently available on Henry's website, http://www.henryperezbooks.com . It also features an excerpt from KILLING RED, and from my new Jack Daniels novel, CHERRY BOMB.

Here's what a famous author has to say:

"FLOATERS is buoyantly engrossing, and you'll want to dive right in. I could also use some kind of 'wet behind the ears' pun, but I'm too busy working on my next novel, TRAPPED." - Jack Kilborn, author of AFRAID and, apparently, TRAPPED

—FREE EBOOKS
For those who haven't been paying attention, I have a FREEBIES page on my website. To date I've given away more than 23,000 ebooks. I've just added even more books to give away, including:

PLANTER'S PUNCH, a collaboration with Tom Schreck where Jack Daniels teams up with Duffy Dombrowski, the hero from his mystery series.

SUCKERS, a collaboration with Jeff Strand, where Harry McGlade teams up with Andrew Mayhem, the hero from his thriller series.

THE WORLD'S WORST POET, which features over 1000 bad jokes and poems, including many I've tweeted on Twitter.

Plus others. These books are free on my website, or if you have an Amazon Kindle, you can download them for less than two bucks each on Amazon.com.

—AFRAID
For the three people in the world who still don't know, I wrote a horror novel under the pen name Jack Kilborn. The book is called AFRAID, and it's available in paperback, ebook, and audio versions.

ARE YOU AFRAID OF THE DARK? YOU WILL BE...

Welcome to Safe Haven, Wisconsin. Miles from everything, with one road in and out, this peaceful town has never needed a full-time police force. Until now...

A helicopter has crashed near Safe Haven and unleashed something horrifying. Now this merciless force is about to do what it does best. Isolate. Terrorize. Annihilate. As residents begin dying in a storm of gory violence, Safe Haven's only chance for survival will rest with an aging county sheriff, a firefighter, and a single mom. And each will have this harrowing thought: Maybe death hasn't come to their town by accident...

You can read more about it, and play the AFRAID Flash game, at http://www.JackKilborn.com .

—BOOK LAUNCH PARTY
The sixth Jack Daniels thriller, CHERRY BOMB, will be out in hardcover and on audio on July 7. I may be

biased, but I think it's a pretty good book. Also, unlike the other Jack Daniels books, this one contains a lot of sex to go along with the scares and laughs.

To celebrate the occasion, I'll be having a book launch party.

WHEN: July 12, 2pm - 4pm
WHERE: CENTURIES & SLEUTHS BOOKSTORE, 7419 W. Madison St. Forest Park, IL 60130 (708) 771-7243
WHO: JA Konrath, Jeff Strand, Henry Perez
FREE BEER: Hell yes

Everyone is invited. Mark your calender. Besides being able to buy Cherry Bomb, you can meet two of my favorite authors, Jeff Strand and Henry Perez, who will be there signing their new books, PRESSURE and KILLING RED. We'll probably have some sort of talk or something, but that will be made bearable by the keg of beer we're bringing to the party. Hope to see you there.

—SUMMER READS
Summer is here, and Joe sez this is what you should be reading.

In paperback:
KILLING RED by Henry Perez - A serial killer thriller that is the best debut I've ever read.
PRESSURE by Jeff Strand - The most frightening novel I've ever read.
A FATAL WALTZ by Tasha Alexander - The best historical mystery writer working today.
DARK SIDE OF THE MORGUE by Raymond Bensen - The second in his terrific Rock 'n roll detective series.
TRIGGER CITY by Sean Chercover - The second in his excellent Ray Dudgeon series.

In hardcover:
THE DOOMSDAY KEY by James Rollins - This one has more action than all four Indiana Jones films combined.
ABANDON by Blake Crouch - Crouch is one of my favorite writers, and this is his best book.
THE AMATEURS by Marcus Sakey - About Last Night meets Reservoir Dogs. Hip, sexy, and fast-paced.
FAULT LINE by Barry Eisler - A thriller tour de force, crammed with sex, action, and an all-too-plausible plot.
THE UNSEEN by Alexandra Sokoloff - Does ESP exist? It may kill you to find out...
DEAD ON by Robert W. Walker - I love Walker's stuff. He's insane.

3 comments

Newsletter #9

While this is blatant self promotion, I'm posting it on my blog to show newbies how to write an effective newsletter. And so far, this one has proven effective.

1. Join http://www.ymlp.com and place an opt in/opt out box on your website to build a mailing list. It's reasonably priced, easy, and does everything for you.

2. Make sure your newsletter is about what you have to offer, not what you have to sell. Like a website, it should impart information and entertainment. Yes, you should mention your latest projects. But contests and freebies also make it viral, causing your recipients to share it with others.

3. Make it brief. Get to the high points, and get out. The fewer newsletters you do per year, the longer you can be, but try to make it readable in under three minutes. I do two or three newsletters a year, and I think that's plenty. Also be gracious, and if possible, funny.

4. Send it during business hours on a weekday. Many people have computers at work, and welcome a mini break. Also make sure you're at your computer when you send it, so you can respond to the barrage of replies you receive.

5. Make sure it contains links, then track those links to monitor your effectiveness. After you read the newsletter, I'll post at the bottom what worked for me.

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Straight Up - The Official Newsletter of Author J.A. Konrath/Jack Kilborn

In this issue:
—Introduction
—Afraid
—Free Book
—Jack Daniels News
—Writing Contest
—Afraid Tour
—More Joe
—Freebies

—INTRODUCTION

You're on this mailing list because you love books. I love them, too. This email is my way of reaching out to readers, librarians, bookstore employees, and fellow authors, in order to give you free stuff. If you want to be taken off this list, you can opt out using the link at the bottom. If you've asked to be removed from this newsletter and haven't been, I apologize. If you've signed up for this newsletter and haven't received it, you probably aren't reading this, but I apologize anyway.

Now let's get to the fun stuff:

—AFRAID

For those who haven't been paying attention, I wrote a horror novel under the pen name Jack Kilborn. The book is called AFRAID. It's coming out next month, in paperback and audio. Here's the basic premise:

###

ARE YOU AFRAID OF THE DARK? YOU WILL BE...

Welcome to Safe Haven, Wisconsin. Miles from everything, with one road in and out, this peaceful town has never needed a full-time police force. Until now...

A helicopter has crashed near Safe Haven and unleashed something horrifying. Now this merciless force is about to do what it does best. Isolate. Terrorize. Annihilate. As residents begin dying in a storm of gory violence, Safe Haven's only chance for survival will rest with an aging county sheriff, a firefighter, and a single mom. And each will have this harrowing thought: Maybe death hasn't come to their town by accident...

###

You can read more about it, and play the AFRAID Flash game, at **http://www.JackKilborn.com** .

—FREE BOOK

AFRAID is being released March 31, but my savvy publisher, Grand Central, is giving 50 of my fans (that's you) a chance to get the book for free.

Yes, I said free. A real, honest to goodness book, at zero cost.

How do you get one?

In case you haven't noticed (and you should considering you're reading this via email) the Internet has become a wonderful marketing tool for authors.

So if you want to get a free paperback copy of AFRAID, I'd like you to use the Internet to help spread the word about it.

We're looking for fifty bloggers to post their reviews of AFRAID. These reviews must be at least 75 words long. It's even okay if you post a negative review about how violent and bloody the book is —I'm fine with that, as long as you hit that 75 word mark.

Along with the blog review, I'd like you to post your review at least one other place on the Internet. Some of the obvious choices are Goodreads.com, Shelfari.com, Booksnbytes.com, Amazon.com, Borders.com, BN.com, Librarything.com, Booksamillion.com, Yahoo groups, DorothyL.com, etc.

How do you enter?

1. Email me at **haknort@wowway.com** with the heading SCARE ME!

2. Include your snail mail address, the URL to the blog where you'll post the review, and tell me which review websites you'll post on. It will help your chances if you to promise to post on several sites.

3. Tell me how much you love me. I dig it when people suck up. It makes me feel like Brando in Apocalypse Now.

That's all. Fifty people who follow those easy instructions will get free books. Perhaps even more than fifty, if the response is overwhelming.

How cool is that?

—JACK DANIELS NEWS

The sixth Jack Daniels thriller, CHERRY BOMB, will be out in hardcover and on audio on July 7. The cheap paperback version of the fifth Jack Daniels novel, FUZZY NAVEL, will be out a few weeks prior to that. But you should have already purchased that in hardcover, you cheapskate.

If you need a Jack Daniels fix right now, you have some options.

MISSING, an anthology edited by Amy Alessio for Echelon Books, features a Jack Daniels novella co-written with Henry Perez, author of the soon-to-be-released thriller KILLING RED. In our story, FLOATERS, Jack tag teams with Henry's character, Chicago newspaper reporter Alex Chapa. Visit **http://www.henryperezbooks.com/HP_STORIES.html** to read about it and find out how to get it. The profits are going to charity, so buy fifty copies and then write it off on your taxes.

SHOT OF TEQUILA, an unpublished crime novel by me that takes place in 1993 and co-stars a very young Jack Daniels, is now available as an ebook download on my website. Visit http://www.jakonrath.com/tequila.htm for the secret details.

LIKE A CHINESE TATTOO by Bill Breedlove, an anthology which features Jack's ex-partner, Harry McGlade, in a novella called THE NECRO FILES. It's waaaaay over-the-top, and probably shouldn't be read by anybody. Jack is in it, too.

In July, Bleak House Books will release UNCAGE ME, edited by Jen Jordan. It also features Harry McGlade, in a short called SCHOOL DAZE.

There's nothing yet to report on the Jack Daniels movie. We may be having trouble selling it because I'm demanding to play Jack. I also insist on directing, editing, and composing the score, which I'm doing entirely on xylophone. If you're interested in buying the rights, contact my agent.

—WRITING CONTEST

On my forum **http://www.jakonrath.com/phpBB3/** I'm holding a bad poetry contest. Sign up and post your drek. The winner gets a gazillion trillion dollars, or a free signed book, my choice. Contest ends on March 8.

—AFRAID TOUR

I'll be cruising around Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, and Michigan, signing copies of AFRAID this April. Watch my website for where and when.

—MORE JOE

For you rabid fans who insist on buying everything with a Konrath story in it (hi Mom), here are two of the latest publications:

WOLFSBANE & MISTLETOE by Charlaine Harris and Toni L. P. Kelner, featuring my werewolf novella SA, which may be the funniest thing I've ever written.

BLOOD LITE by Kevin J. Anderson, featuring a story I wrote with F. Paul Wilson called THE SOUND OF BLUNDER, which may also be the funniest thing I've ever written.

—FREEBIES

Free stuff is cool. A few times a year I have a random drawing for free J.A. Konrath merchandise, and everyone on my mailing list is eligible. Three newsletter subscribers have been randomly picked to receive some cool gifts.

The lucky winners this time are:

goodman.carrie(at)gmail.com
debra.suto(at)fumch.org
kathyboat(at)bellsouth.net

Email me to get your swag. And keep an eye on JAKonrath.com for updates and news.

See you on the road!

Joe

http://www.JAKonrath.com
http://JAKonrath.blogspot.com
http://www.facebook.com/people/JA_Konrath/679343992
http://www.myspace.com/jakonrath
http://www.twitter.com/jakonrath

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In a nutshell, pretty much everything I wanted to work, worked. My Amazon numbers of all my books, including the anthos, spiked.

I got triple my average daily hits on my websites.

I got more than fifty people who want to blog about AFRAID in exchange for a free book (and more keep coming —feel free to send me an email if you're interested.)

I sold more copies of SHOT OF TEQUILA, and **Sheila** is very close to being saved.

A newsletter is one more weapon in your self-promotion arsenal. Use it wisely, and it can be an effective one.

1 comments

Motivation

How Joe Konrath Got Published

After my sixth novel failed to sell, I knew it was time to get serious.

My Rejection Book was filled to bursting, bong slips divided into agent and editor categories. Close to four hundred of them. With the baby's first birthday approaching and a new house recently purchased, my friends and family were beginning to wonder when I was going to give up this 'hobby' and get a real job working nine to five.

I made my living waiting tables. The flexible schedule allowed me plenty of time to write. My wife worked in the same restaurant, and I would often trade shifts with her if the muse was in overdrive. She'd always been supportive, even when we were dating and I had my BAD AGENT EXPERIENCE.

Rewind to three years earlier. I was fresh out of college, where I majored in Television. I'd switched my major to TV from Film, because I heard it was too hard to get a job in film.

I found out it was just as hard to get a job in television. Though I had good grades, and a killer show reel, I'd graduated in the middle of a huge recession, and was going up for entry level positions against people with years of experience.

I tried my best, failed, and then wondered what the heck my education was good for, other than teaching me how to make my own beer bongs and how to add watermelon Jolly Ranchers to a bottle of vodka for killer shots.

Since writing is what I wanted to pursue in both Film and TV, and since I had a love of books and had already written dozens of short stories, I decided to take the plunge and write a mystery novel.

It took a few months. When I finished, I picked up a Writer's Market book, picked out six agents, and sent them copies of the book, figuring it was only a matter of time until one of them called me.

Believe it or not, one did.

He was a respected, well-known agent with some big name clients, and I immediately signed on the dotted line. I drove to New York to meet him soon after, and he took me to a five star restaurant and filled my head with promises of fame and riches while I fought a losing battle trying to match him martini for martini.

Life was good.

When I came back home, I considered quitting my job. After all, the sale would come quick, and the money would roll in.

A week passes. A month. Three months.

I call my superstar agent, and get an assistant, who explains that sometimes it takes a while to sell a book.

That hadn't been what Mr. Bigshot told me over Grey Goose, but I still trusted the guy.

Six months pass. A year. By this time, I've written a sequel to the first book, and I send it to Mr. Bigshot.

A few weeks pass, and I call him to see if he's read the new book.

His assistant explains that he's really busy.

Another six months go by. Finally, I call up Mr. Bigshot and insist on speaking to him personally. The assistant won't allow it. So I insist on getting a lost of all the publishing houses that have rejected my book.

The assistant sends me a list. A list of two houses.

In nineteen months, he'd shown by book to two editors.

Even though I was ignorant about NY publishing, I knew this was bad. There were dozens of publishing houses who bought mysteries. Only going to two of them proved this guy wasn't doing a thing for me.

I fired him, deciding to look for a new agent. After all, he was easy to get. All I had to do was buy the latest Writer's Market, pick out a few more agents, and wait for them to call.

No one called. I tried every agent in NY, and couldn't get anyone interested in my series.

This lead to a bout of depression. My girlfriend (who later became my wife) offered to cheer my up by buying me a unique gift. A tattoo.

"That's very white-trash of you, honey," I told her.

But she explained that she had 100% faith that I'd someday be published, and a tattoo would inspire me to keep trying.

Well, we went to Jade Dragon in Chicago, and I had them put a little frowny face on my right shoulder.

But now, after six unpublished novels, all the frowny face did was depress me even more.

Should I continue pursuing the dream of becoming a published author? Or should I do the responsible thing and get a well-paying office job?

"You aren't allowed to give up," my girlfriend (now my wife) told me. "You're a writer, whether you get paid for it or not."

She was right. I'd be miserable doing anything else.

So I decided to write a blockbuster.

My previous approach to writing was very free-form and unstructured. I'd write when I felt like it, about whatever I felt like. My growing pile of form letter rejections was testament to how well this worked for me. I needed to regroup.

The term 'high-concept' is often bandied around Hollywood, used to describe movies that have strong, central hooks. Blockbuster novels have hooks as well. "Shark kills swimmers on New York beach." "Little girl is possessed by the devil." "Science learns to clone dinosaurs." "FBI trainee interviews a captured serial killer." I wanted to write something like that; something that could be described in a brief sentence, but still perfectly conveyed the story idea.

Coming up with a catchy hook on which to base ninety thousand words was easier said than done. I took a break from writing to brainstorm. How could I put a new spin on an old concept? What topic could capture the public's imagination?

I decided on something with universal appeal. The hook: Satan is being held and studied in a secret government laboratory.

It would be a cross between Jurassic Park and the Exorcist. A thriller that pits cutting edge technology against thousands of years of theology. Plus, it had the biggest monster of them all; an eight foot tall, cloven hoofed Beelzebub, complete with bat wings, horns, and a predilection for eating live sheep.

To do the story justice, I knew I had to research the hell out of it, so to speak. When I had a confident grasp of the science and religion involved, I worked on developing characters who would interact with the demon, and then a story line that would do the concept proud.

A year later, my techno thriller ORIGIN was completed.

Now what was I supposed to do with it?

I went back to my Rejection Book to review my previous queries, and was surprised to see how poor they were. The letters fell into two distinct categories; egocentric and desperate. Rather than succinctly pitch my novels, I had been begging for them to be read, or stating how rich I'd make the publisher once they bought me.

Plus, I was shocked to see typos and poor grammar, not only in the queries, but in the sample chapters I'd submitted.

For ORIGIN, I needed a different approach. I decided to do the same thing publishers do to sell books. Namely, an ad campaign.

Rather than a standard query letter and sample chapters, I put together a four page package. The first page was a two paragraph excerpt from the novel, when the hero first sees Satan sitting in a gigantic plexiglass

cage. The second page was styled like back-jacket copy, describing the story and the hook in a few sentences. The third page was an author bio, with black and white photo. The final page was a simple note stating that the book was seeking representation, and my phone number.

No SASE. No return address. I didn't even personalize the note.

I made one hundred and twenty submission packages, and sent one to every agent in the Writer's Digest Literary Agent Guide.

I sent these on a Thursday.

By Tuesday, I had five agent phone calls, all demanding to see the book.

I was in shock. Usually, an agent response took between three and ten weeks. Now I had them fighting over me. What should I do?

Luckily, I had previous agent experience, so I knew how to approach the situation.

When I finished my first novel, I sent it to six NY agents, and one of them took me on. I sat back and waited for the money to roll in.

Eighteen months later, and the agent isn't returning my calls. When I finally pin this person down, I find out the agent submitted my book to a total of two editors in a year and a half.

This time, I wanted to hire an agent who would work for me. I wanted to be involved in every aspect of the submission process. My next agent would keep me informed, be my biggest advocate, and help me build a career.

After several phone interviews with ultimately twelve agents, I decided on Todd Keithley from Jane Dystel Literary Management. Todd was my age, had a specific plan to market me, and most of all, loved the book.

There was rewriting. And more rewriting. And more rewriting.

Todd generated a buzz in NY about the book, and went out to the top fifteen publishers with an expiration date on the manuscript.

It was very exciting, and a thrill to be a part of.

The rejections were the hardest of my life.

On the plus side, many editors said wonderful things about me, and my book. I got many compliments, and finally vindication from the publishing world that I indeed had talent.

But ORIGIN was ultimately rejected because it slipped through the genre cracks. Editors didn't know how to market it. Was it horror? Sci-fi? Techno-thriller? Comedy? Where did this book fit on the shelves?

To compound the injury, Todd then left the agency to pursue a law practice in Maryland.

I was devastated.

Luckily, his boss saw potential in me. Before Todd bid his final adieu, I received a phone call from Jane Dystel who succinctly asked, "What else have you got?"

I did have something else; another high concept idea that came to me while writing ORIGIN. I pitched it over the phone to Jane.

"Write it," she advised.

I did.

Another year passed, research and writing. When I finished, I gave Jane the same kind of ad campaign I'd designed for ORIGIN.

Jane loved it. She generated a buzz and went out to seventeen publishing houses.

The rejections mirrored those received by ORIGIN. What kind of book was this? Was it a thriller, or a comedy?

But one publisher liked it. There was a problem, however. The book was a hundred and thirty thousand words.

"Can you cut thirty thousand?"

I said I could. The effort was one of the most frustrating, and at the same time rewarding, episodes in my writing career. Because I didn't want to affect the story, I delegated myself to trimming the fat.

And there was fat. A lot of it.

When I finished, the editor read the revision and said, "Cut another ten thousand words."

Now there was no choice; I had to cut story. It was very difficult to do. I was forced to confront my novel and determine what was essential to the plot, and what could be left out without disturbing the narrative flow.

But I did it. And it improved the book, a lot.

The editor read this version and said, "You know, I think I like your concept more than your execution of the concept. Can you start over from the beginning?"

Jane stepped in before I popped a blood vessel.

"We'll move on to the next book, Joe."

For my third book with the agency, I decided to make sure I wrote in a specific, distinct, defined genre, the medical thriller. Also, because editors seemed puzzled by the amount of humor I was putting in my books, I completely cut out the jokes.

After another year of writing and research, I gave the results to Jane.

She HATED it, and refused to represent it. Jane liked my sense of humor, and a novel without jokes had no spark.

Back to square one.

Again, I took time away from writing to brainstorm. I liked Jane a lot, as a person and as an agent, but I didn't think she'd keep me on as a client if I kept giving her books she couldn't sell.

My last three books were failures, but they were important failures. They taught me how to rewrite. They taught me that I needed to use humor. They taught me that techno thrillers and medical thrillers weren't working for me.

So what genre was left? What would be the best vehicle for my sense of humor.

I went downstairs and began perusing my library. A pattern emerged. Janet Evanovich. Robert B. Parker. Lawrence Block. Robert Crais. Donald Westlake.

All my life I loved mysteries. My favorites were series characters, especially ones that were funny.

Why hadn't I thought of that before? This was a genre I knew and loved, and something that would allow me to zing the one-liners and have fun.

I created Violent Crimes Lieutenant Jack Daniels of the Chicago PD. I used every convention popular in successful mysteries; a flawed but funny hero, a recurring cast of oddball characters, a catchy title that instantly identified the series, a spring-loaded plot.

A few months later, I gave WHISKEY SOUR to Jane, along with proposals for the second and third books in the series, BLOODY MARY and RUSTY NAIL.

Jane loved it.

She helped me tweak the concept, and after two requisite rewrites, she went out with the book.

In the meantime, I started work on another high concept novel, so when WHISKEY SOUR got rejected, I'd have something else to pitch to Jane.

But the damnedest thing happened. A few days after Jane submitted the book, she gave me a call.

"We have an offer. It's for six figures."

She named a number. I jumped around my house like a wind-up toy.

"That's great! We're accepting it, right?"

"No. Another editor is interested. I think I can get more. In the meantime, Leslie Wells at Hyperion wants to talk to you. Is tomorrow morning good for you?"

Leslie was a hero of mine, having edited two of my favorite authors, Ridley Pearson and Robert Crais. The thought of working with her awed me.

But what should I say? How should I act?

"Just be yourself," Jane advised. "I think you'll like each other."

Leslie and I instantly hit it off. She loved my book, but more importantly, she had great plans for the series, and great ideas on how to make WHISKEY SOUR even better.

I got off the phone hoping Hyperion would wind up with the book.

The call came two days later.

"Joe? Jane Dystel. Are you sitting down? Hyperion made an offer..."

After ten books, twelve years, and four hundred and sixty rejections, my dream had finally come true.

My wife took me out to celebrate. But we didn't go out to eat. We didn't go to a concert, or a show, or to France.

We went to a tattoo parlor.

Now, on my left shoulder, there's a smiley face.

To match the other smiley face I wear all the time.

After The Big Sale

What happens after you land a three book publishing deal? This journal tells all, chronicling my first few months as a full time writer.

An edited version of this appeared in the June 2004 edition of Writer's Digest Magazine, and a follow up called After the Book Comes Out will appear in Fall 2005.

Until then, here's the full, unexpurgated version of what happened right after I got *the call*...

12/2/2002
My agent, Jane Dystel, calls with amazing news; Hyperion has made a six-figure offer for my first mystery novel, Whiskey Sour, and the next two books in the Lt. Jack Daniels series. I run around screaming for several minutes. This prompts a call from my neighbors, who are concerned I'm being murdered.

My wife, who has stood by side for nine shelved novels and over four hundred rejections, begins to cry.

I ask Jane when the contract will arrive. She tells me we aren't accepting the offer yet. Another publisher is also interested, and we should be able to get more money.

I've never done any hard drugs, but I can guess this is what they feel like.

12/3
Jane tells me to expect a phone call from Leslie Wells, the editor at Hyperion. She'd like to speak to me, to get a sense of my personality. "How should I act?" I ask Jane. She says, "Be yourself–you'll do fine."

12/4
Leslie calls, and we instantly hit it off. She's edited two of my favorite authors, Ridley Pearson and Robert Crais. Leslie asks if I can FedEx an 8x10 picture of myself and a brief bio, in time for their acquisitions meeting tomorrow. Luckily, I have a good black and white photo of me in a snooty author pose..

I spend a few hours trying to make myself seem interesting in the bio. It's harder than writing the book, but I manage and catch FedEx that night.

12/5
Hyperion makes a final offer. We accept. My wife and I celebrate with $150 champagne. I also have a bottle delivered to Jane, along with plastic cups so the whole office can toast.

I take my family and friends out to eat, and my mom makes me promise I won't forget her if I become famous. "Mom, who?" I reply.

12/9
I'm at a bookstore, and on a whim pick up the latest copy of Publisher's Weekly. There it is, in the Short

Takes section; the details of my deal. I read my name, and realize it is the very first time it's ever been in print. I buy all the copies they have.

12/15
The contract arrives. It's 18 pages long, full of legalese. I call a lawyer friend and ask him to explain the term 'force majeure' (it basically means acts of God beyond the publisher's control).

I initial each page and sign it, then FedEx it back. My book will be released in June of 2004. It seems a long time away.

12/31
New Year's Eve is usually the worst day of the year for me. I normally spend the day depressed and regretful, looking at another year without a writing sale.

Not this year!

1/5
I join the Mystery Writers of America and the Horror Writers Association as an active member.

1/20
I complete a novella starring my hero from Whiskey Sour, Jacqueline Daniels. I decide to send it to Ellery Queen, a magazine that has rejected many previous stories.

2/6
I attend my first writing convention, Love is Murder, and speak on my first panel. It's a lot of fun, I meet some big-name authors, and I network with many people.

I pass out free copies of a self-published chapbook. Some people ask for me to sign them, which makes me giggle like a idiot.

2/10
My check arrives. I buy a computer–my other books were all written on an archaic word processor. I also see an accountant about incorporating and becoming a sole-proprietorship.

2/11
I quit my job. I've been a server for twelve years. Waiting tables allowed me a flexible schedule, so I always had time to write.

Now my full time profession is writing, which is something I've dreamed about forever.

I continue to work on and submit short stories to paying markets.

2/16

I sell a story to Horror Garage magazine.

2/25
I begin contacting some of my favorite authors, soliciting blurbs for Whiskey Sour. Many say they'll do it, which thrills me. Talking to famous writers is almost as much fun as being a writer.

3/10
Leslie sends me an edited copy of the manuscript. I'm to make all of her changes and send her a copy on disk.
As expected, her suggestions are wonderful, albeit complicated. I FedEx it to her within a week.

3/11
Ellery Queen wants to buy my Jack Daniels novella. They send me a publishing contract. I run around the house, screaming.

My neighbor calls, wondering if I'm being murdered.

3/15
I hire a friend to help me create a website, and immerse myself in the world of HTML, jpgs, and transloading. My goal; when the site is active, I want to be able to update it and make changes myself.

3/30
I get a part-time job at the College of Dupage, teaching fiction writing and marketing. I've wanted to teach ever since I was a kid, and am thrilled to finally have a chance.

4/1
I receive the Hyperion Author Questionnaire. It's roughly thirty questions, some of them very detailed. I fill it out carefully, and also include a marketing plan, a bio, and a list of authors who will blurb me.

I also put together a mock-up of a possible cover, with suggestions on what I'd like to see. I figure it can't hurt.

4/10
Short story rejection. I find another market and send it back out.

4/13
WWW.JOEKONRATH.COM is finally up and running, and I've got a good working knowledge of how to keep it updated. I submit the URL to search engines, making sure the site description and metatags are perfect.

To make the site 'sticky' (keep people there), I offer writing tips, a fiction contest, a newsletter, giveaways, an appearance schedule, free stories and excerpts, downloads, a message board, and a massive links page–anyone who links to me, gets a link back.

4/15
I write my first newsletter, and email it to roughly two hundred people.

4/17
I attend the World Horror Convention, get to speak on several panels, and meet many famous authors. I pass out a hundred free chapbooks, sign some autographs, and have my first official scheduled reading. Three people attend. But, dammit, I really entertained those three!

I also participate in the annual gross-out contest, in front of a few hundred people. I get booed offstage, but it is a lot of fun.

4/20
Leslie sends back my manuscript with more requested changes. Some are tricky, but I happily comply and FedEx.

4/28
Short story rejection. I find another market and send it back out.

5/1
Michael Bourrett, a sub-rights agent at Dystel and Goderich, needs me to send more copies of the manuscript to submit to audio book publishers.

I print them, and calculate which is costing me more: inkjet cartridges or Fed Ex? Inkjet wins.

5/2
Good news: I learn to refill my own inkjet cartridges. Bad news: my fingernails will be black for the rest of my life.

5/8
My site is finally showing up on search engines. I design and print my own business cards to promote it..

5/16
Hyperion sends me an author photo permission slip, allowing them to use my bio photo for the jacket cover. My wife, who took the picture, is pretty excited.

5/20
Short story rejection. I find another market send it back out.

6/6
Hyperion has printed up advance uncorrected bound manuscripts of Whiskey Sour, to send out for blurbs. They like trade paperbacks, perfect bound spines and white cardstock covers. The pages are formatted the

same as in MS Word.
I get some copies, and pass them out to people who'll give me quotes or reviews.

6/7
Chicago Printer's Row Book Fair. I pass out fifty free chapbooks.

6/10
I'm sent the line edit for Whiskey Sour. This goes into more detail than the previous edits, and I have to make several dozen changes and revisions, which are all written out on yellow sticky notes. It's the toughest edit yet.

I learn what 'stet' means, and begin using it in everyday conversation whenever someone is bothering me. (It means 'leave it alone')

I also get a wonderful letter from my line editor. She tells me that she really loved the book, and is hoping that she'll get to copyedit the next two in the series.

Fed Ex when I finish.

6/14
I attend Dark and Stormy Nights Conference, doing a How To Get Published panel that is well attended and received.

I pass out fifty more chapbooks.

6/15
The blurbs start coming in. I'm actually embarrassed by all of the nice things fellow authors say about me. My wife asks if I'm paying them.

I wind up with over a dozen quotes, many of them from bestsellers. I put them on my website.

6/17
My first conference call. I spend an hour on the phone with my publicist and marketing director, discussing strategies and possible hooks. It's fun, but most of it goes way over my head.

After the call, I pick up several books on promotion and marketing, so I can understand what the heck they said.

6/25
I get my first fan letter, from a woman who has discovered my site over the internet.

7/1
The Marketing Department asks me if they can use my first two initials on the front cover. I'll be J.A.

rather than Joe. I understand their reasoning–women are the primary book buyers, and a unisex first name might find a bigger initial audience.

I ask my agent her opinion. Jane says, "Always defer to Marketing."

No problem. I'd change my name to Schnookie Badookums if it would sell more books.

I change my website to **WWW.JAKONRATH.COM** and resubmit to all the search engines.

7/3
I begin work on the synopsis for the next book in the Jack Daniels series. My contract says it's due on 8/1. I'm a fast writer, and figure it'll be easy, even though I've never written a synopsis before.

7/5
This synopsis thing is a lot harder than I expected. I write free-form. Half the time, I don't know where the story is headed until I get there. Instinct and intuition.

A forty page outline (one chapter=one paragraph) means I have to know what is going to happen in advance. Every conflict, twist, character, and action has to be explained.

Although I might be a fast writer, I learn that I'm not a fast plotter.

7/10
Two short story rejections. I find other markets send them back out.

7/15
A writer friend gives me manuscript to blurb it. My first blurb!

7/17
Leslie sends me a timeline for Whiskey Sour. There are some big continuity problems. I ask if I can insert a time machine into the narrative as a quick fix. No dice.

I work like a dog to get the manuscript back in the requested three days. I also decide to buy stock in Fed Ex, as they're getting rich off of me.

7/18
I speak at my local library, talking about what it is like to be a new author. The crowd of two people love me.

7/19
I finish the synopsis, and email it to my agent to review. Jane loves it, and says it is one of the best she's ever read. I email it to my editor.

7/20
Leslie calls me. She doesn't like the synopsis at all. In her opinion, it can't be fixed. I have to come up with an entirely new plot. I pitch her my idea for the third book in the series, and she likes it.

I have ten days to finish.

7/22
The first pass arrives. This is how the typeset, copyedited pages will look when the book is published.

I must read Whiskey Sour again, looking for errors. It's hard. I've read the book so many times, I've memorized whole sections.

It's due by 8/1 — the same time the synopsis is due.

7/28
I finish making the required changes to the first pass, and decide to use the United States Post Office overnight delivery service, rather than FedEx, to send the manuscript back. It'll save me ten bucks.

7/29
The unthinkable happens. The post office loses the manuscript.

I'm horrified. I spent countless hours correcting the first pass, and I don't relish the idea of doing it over.

8/1
The synopsis for the second novel in the series is due today, along with the first two chapters. I manage to get them done by forgoing certain luxuries, like sleeping and eating. But I'm ultimately happy with the end result.

So is my editor, which is a huge relief.

My wife asks if I was angry having to do two synopses. I explain that I'm not. I'm living my dream, and I've experienced enough rejection to not take it personally. Publishing is a business, and I'm a professional. I'd write ten more synopses if Hyperion asked.

8/3
After phone calls to my post office, central dispatch, the Postmaster General, and the President of the United States, my package is found and ultimately delivered. Since 'overnight' doesn't normally mean 'five days', the post office refunds my money.

8/10
The FedEx guy, who I'm now on a first name basis with, delivers a package. It's my cover art.

I love it, even though it has nothing to do with my original concept.

8/15
I attend Horrorfind Weekend, give out more chapbooks, meet more authors and fans. People are beginning to recognize my name, which is wonderful, considering my book won't be out for another ten months.

8/20
I write my second newsletter. This one gets emailed to 1300 people. The networking and self promotion is apparently paying off.

8/26
Michael sells the audio rights for the Jack Daniels series. I'm thrilled, and send him and the agency fifty dollars worth of bakery goods.

I call Eileen Hutton, the editor at Brilliance Audio, to convey my excitement.

9/8
Whiskey Sour appears on Amazon.com for pre-order. I call up everyone I know to tell them.

9/9
Hyperion sends me a large color slick of what the front and back covers of the advance reading copies (ARCs) will look like. It's wonderful, but I dislike the inner jacket copy–the wording is clumsy, and it doesn't accurately portray the tone of the book.

I email Leslie, asking if I can rewrite the copy, but the ARCs are already going to press. I send her my revision and hope for the best.

9/20
I contact Writer's Digest and pitch an article idea, based on my path to publication. Christine

Mersch writes back, explaining she's looking for a journal type of article, concentrating on what happens after the book sale.

I redo my proposal, and get a green light to submit an article on spec. I hope they buy it.

9/30
The ARCs of Whiskey Sour arrive. They are truly beautiful — the art, the blurbs, the layout; everything looks great. Plus, they went with my revised inner jacket copy.

Holding one in my hand makes me feel like a real author for the very first time.

I email Hyperion, thanking everyone for doing such a tremendous job. My thank you note gets passed around, and I wind up hearing from many people involved in putting the book together. One of them gives my the greatest compliment I've ever received:

"I just read the Whiskey Sour bound manuscript over the weekend and absolutely loved it. I accidentally missed my subway stop the other day because I was so wrapped up in finishing it."

10/1
I do a live online chat for HWA. They tout me as The Rejection King, since I've gotten almost five hundred bong letters. The chat goes well, and is a lot of fun.

10/13
I talk at a local library about how to get published, and bring along the short story rejection I received that morning.

10/16
I make my first anthology sale. I'm going to be in Jeanne Cavelos's "The Many Faces of Van Helsing," coming out in trade paper from Ace in April.

10/17
For fun, I figure out how much time I work every week. When I waited tables, I'd work thirty hours, then spend another twenty writing
Since I began writing full time, I average sixty hours a week. Some days I'm on my computer for fifteen hours straight.

11/10
Writer's Digest buys my article. I feel like my career has come full circle. I read WD for many years, seeking advice and guidance. Now I'm in the magazine, giving advice and guidance.

Unfortunately, I don't have time for reflection right now–the first draft of my second novel is due in January, and I haven't gotten started on it yet. . .

After The Book Comes Out

3/21/03
It's often mentioned in the publishing community that the second book is harder to write than the first. This is true.

I had no problems, though, because my second book was actually my eleventh.

When I signed a three book deal with Hyperion, they had no idea how long I'd been struggling to get published. As far as they new, Whiskey Sour, the first in the Jack Daniels thriller series, was the first thing I'd ever written.

In reality, I'd written over a million words without selling a thing, earning my living as a waiter.

So when it came time to write the second Daniels book, Bloody Mary, I had no fear of the sophomore slump. I turned in what I knew to be a much better book than Whiskey Sour, and waited for my editor to lavish me with praise.

3/30
My editor lavishes me with edits.

I quickly divide her 'nit list' into three columns; those suggestions I agree with, those I'm on the fence about, and those I absolutely won't do, no matter what. I write her a very nice email, stating my case, backing up my arguments with clear and concise examples. My letter is so persuasive, so compelling, that it's worthy of a thesis.

3/31
My editor thanks me for replying, understands my points, and tells me to make the changes anyway.

I don't have a big ego–garnering over 450 rejections goes a long way towards keeping a guy grounded. But I really don't want to make these changes. I go whining to my wife, demanding sympathy.

"They're paying you," she says. "Make the changes."

I make the changes.

4/2
Hyperion buys a 1/3 page ad for Whiskey Sour in Publisher's Weekly. The pub date for my novel is June 2nd, which can't arrive soon enough for me.

I also get my first major review for WS, from Kirkus. They call the book "A rapid-fire debut thriller." I can live with that!

4/6
The anthology **The Many Faces of Van Helsing** comes out, featuring my story "The Screaming." This is the very first time I've been on a bookstore shelf. I email all of my friends and family and demand they rush out and buy a copy.

4/9
I attend the World Horror Convention in Phoenix, and I can't stress enough how important writing cons are. You network, talk shop, hear buzz and rumors about the Biz, and get your name 'out there.'

I pass out a lot of business cards, talk about my upcoming book to any who will listen, meet editors and booksellers, and learn a lot. Best tip: even though short stories don't pay well, keep doing them. They're like free advertising for your novels.

4/14
Through conferences, email, and the grapevine, I've become friends with many 'name' writers. One of them, mystery author Rob Kantner, has put together a collection of his short stories. Having grown up reading Rob, I begged him to let me write a foreword for the book.

He graciously consented. Unfortunately, no one in Big City Publishing was interested in a short story collection from a midlist author.

I asked Rob, somewhat hesitantly, if he'd mind if I shopped it around. I've been working on self-promotion for over a year, and I've met a lot of people.

The result? Trouble is What I Do is coming out soon, from Point Blank Press, featuring an intro by yours truly.

4/22
An acceptance! I still do the Snoopy Dance whenever I sell something, and today the mailman brings me a contract from Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. This is the second story of mine they've bought. After so many years of bad news, it's nice to be finally getting some good. I'm convinced it can only get better.

5/1
Publisher's Weekly reviews Whiskey Sour and says, "Reading like an ill-conceived cross between Carl Hiaasen and Thomas Harris, this cliché-ridden first novel should find a wide audience among less discriminating suspense fans."

Ouch!

After my initial shock, I try to judge my reaction, and I'm surprised to find myself bemused. I never really thought about it before, but the hundreds of rejections I've gotten really thickened my skin.

Besides, the quote can be edited down to "(a) cross between Carl Hiaasen and Thomas Harris," which I put on my website.

5/5
This is officially the greatest day of my writing career.

FedEx drops off the hardcover copies of Whiskey Sour. Holding it my hands for the first time, I begin to cry–but not like a baby. I cry manly, macho tears, like Rocky when he beat Apollo.

The FedEx guy comes back an hour later, and brings copies of the June 2004 Writer's Digest, which features my article "After the Big Sale." I'm out of my mind with happiness.

Then the mailman arrives with my copies of Ellery Queen, featuring the first story I sold them.

Just when things can't get any better, by editor emails me a glowing review from BookPage, which calls Whiskey Sour, "Easily one of the best debut suspense novels in recent years." My book has also made the cover of the magazine.

I'm 34 years old. I wrote my first book when I was 22. I've waited twelve years for this day, twelve years of hard work, rejection, and zero reward.
This one day has made it all worth while.

5/6
The FedEx guy drops off copies of my audiobook. It's read by the talented duo of Dick Hill and Susie Breck, but I have a small part. My young son can't get enough of hearing Dad's voice on the CD.

Neither can Dad.

5/13
Whiskey Sour is named a BookSense Pick for June. BookSense is run by the American Booksellers Association, and to have my book honored in this way is incredible.

I add this to my website, which is taking up more and more of my time. JAKonrath.com began as a simple author homepage with a few free stories and a few writing tips. Now it's blossomed to more than sixty pages of content. I spent about five hours a week updating the site, which cuts into my writing time, but is necessary if I want people to make return visits.

5/15
My publisher is planning a big event for me at the upcoming Book Expo America. There will be a cocktail party, in my honor, attended by independent booksellers.

My publicist decides that I need a media coach, to train me for the party so I don't say anything stupid.

Normally, I'm receptive to everything my publisher does for me, but I'm sure I don't need a media coach. I'm good with people, and have a lot of public speaking experience.

But rather than be insulted, I try to keep an open mind.

5/17
The media coach calls, and we 'role-play' the party. And now I'm officially insulted.

"Pretend I'm a bookseller," the coach says, getting paid more an hour than I make in a week, "and I ask you if your book took a lot of research. What do you say?"

I tell her that I went beyond research and actually did hands-on training. "For example, to fully understand the villain in the book, a serial killer, I would cruise the streets of Chicago at night and murder prostitutes."

Long stretch of silence.

"Maybe you shouldn't say that," she says finally.

Apparently media coaches aren't big on humor.

As the hour drags on, she asks what I'm going to wear to the party, as it will be semi-formal.

"I've rented something already," I tell her.

"A tuxedo?"

"A big, pink bunny suit."

She doesn't laugh. My publicist isn't amused, either, when the coach tells her all about the session.

5/20
Hard to believe it's been eighteen months since signing my contract, but Whiskey Sour is finally on the shelves! The pub date isn't until June 2nd, but apparently 'shelf date' and 'pub date' are two different things. It's still not for sale on Amazon, but all of my local stores have copies.

5/29
My book launch party. We have it at the restaurant I used to work at, and a local indie bookstore does the bookselling.

Friends, family, and fellow writers buy 110 copies of Whiskey Sour, and then we all go back to my house and celebrate until three in the morning.

It's the new greatest day of my career.

6/1
Though the media coach left no lasting impression on me, I find myself second-guessing my image, or my lack of one.

Somehow, I've gotten to my mid-thirties without ever having bought a suit. I rarely shave because I don't have to. The only thing distinctive about my features is my double chin.

This troubles me, because I'm about to become a public figure, and I'm not sure how I want to portray myself to the public.

So I put myself in the hands of an expert; I go to a tailor. We pick out a nice, silk blazer, a collared shirt, and a pair of slacks. The outfit costs more than the rest of my wardrobe, combined.

I also shave my stubble into a stylish goatee (which hides my double chin), and change my boring, everyday glasses to those trendy kind with the black plastic frames that I've always hated but my wife likes.
So after a lifetime of dressing for comfort, I now have a 'look.' The 'look' is: a pudgy Clark Kent with a beard and a nice suit. I can live with it.

6/6
Book Expo America is the largest book event of the year. Hundreds of thousands of people attend, every publisher in the business has a booth, and when I walked into McCormick Place I was so overwhelmed by the sheer size of it I had a panic attack.

Where do I fit into all of this?

I visited my publisher's booths, Hyperion and Brilliance Audio, and both had stacks of my books to give away (at BEA, everything is free... huzzah! I walked out of there with 80 books.)

My first event is the BookSense luncheon. I'm seated at the table with an assistant publicist and a gaggle of booksellers, each of whom get a copy of Whiskey Sour. I work the table, talking to each person, signing their copies. Because I'm not in my seat I don't get served, and miss lunch (it looked good, too.)

I also get to stand up alongside such stars as Dave Barry, Christopher Moore, Chuck Palnuihik, Laura Lippmann, and Ridley Pearson. When the photographer takes my picture, I vogue for him.

That night is my cocktail party, at the Allerton in downtown Chicago. I put on the new suit, slap on some cologne, and go see what Hyperion has done for me.

They've done more than I ever could have imagined.

There's a giant table, stacked high with my books. There are coasters with the book's jacket design on them, strewn around the banquet hall. A bartender is pouring–you guessed it–whiskey sours. And people... over a hundred, all there to meet me.

For four hours I shake hands, sign books, and be the best JA Konrath I can be. It's a heady, and exhausting, experience.

I'm the last person to leave, and I get home at 3am, knowing I have to be up at 6am for Day Two.

6/7
For some reason known only to book people, BEA takes place the same weekend as Chicago's Printer's Row Bookfair.

Today I split my time between the two. In the morning, I have three signings at PR. Since I'm a new, unknown author, I'm not surprised that I sell very few books. At one booth, I don't sell a single copy, while the famous author next to me sells one book after another.

It's extremely disheartening, especially considering the many future events I'd lined up. Will they all be like this?

After that slow start, I go back to BEA for another party, thrown by my audio publisher. While I have a very formal, reserved relationship with Hyperion, I have a fun, easy going connection with Brilliance Audio. So after very little sleep, and a depressing morning, I'm ready to take off my tie and have some fun.

Among the guests at the party were Hyperion's President, Bob Miller. Needless to say, the tie stays on. I get the chance to have a long talk with Bob, who pays me a terrific compliment.

"We like you, Joe, because you're the kind of guy who will drive around with a box of books in his trunk and hand sell them. Most authors expect the publisher to do all the work, when it's their book as much as ours."

The party ends late, and I'm so tired I can't even see. Get home at 3am, up at 6am for Day Three.

6/8
I have another signing at Printer's Row, but I decide to play it differently. Rather than sit behind a table full of my books, I stand in front of the table and introduce myself to people who walk by. I used to be a waiter; if I can sell a $40 steak to a guest in a restaurant, I can sell a $20 book to a booklover.

By the time my hour is up, I've sold twelve books.

Then it's back to BEA, where I do a signing at my audio publisher's booth. It's the writing fantasy I've had since I was a kid; an endless line of people, all waiting patiently for my signature. (Of course, they're getting the books for free, so I don't get a big head about it.)

I sign about two hundred audiobooks, and many people in line recognize me. "I read about you in Writer's Digest." "I read your story in that anthology." "I heard about you in that review." "I've been to your website." "I love those stylish black glasses." (okay, I made that last one up.)

The hour flies by. Then it's back to Printer's Row for my last signing. My energy is fading, but I manage to sell ten books, get home at a reasonable time, and then sleep for fourteen hours straight.

It was the hardest weekend of my entire life, and also the most rewarding.

6/12
Every morning, when I turn on my computer, I'm amazed by the number of emails I'm getting from people who have read my book, or one of my stories, or one of my articles.

Total strangers, who have taken the time to pay me a compliment, ask some advice, share a bit of their writing with me, or just say hello.

I make an effort to answer each email, and sometimes it takes me an hour or two. This cuts into my website time, which cuts into my publicity time, which cuts into my writing time, but it quickly becomes the highlight of my day. The concept of 'fans' was always just that; a concept. To actually have fans is an experience I wouldn't trade for anything.

6/13
My name is Joe Konrath, and I'm addicted to Amazon.

I try not to look. I really try. But upwards of fifteen times a day, I go to Amazon.com, searching for new customer reviews, and checking to see if my book sales rank has changed.

The sales rank compares my book to the three million other books also on Amazon. I've cracked the top 10,000 a few times, and my highest score was 2991 (meaning only 2990 books are selling better than mine at that moment, and I'm selling better than everything else).

The reviews have been mostly 4 or 5 stars, but I've gotten a few zingers. They include:

"Don't waste your money!"

"Shame on the publisher."

"What a waste of paper!"

And my favorite, "A nasty little pustule of a book."

The latter was done by a self-professed 'former galley checker' who claimed I had some technical inaccuracies. She also called me "Ms. Konrath." Perhaps this meticulous galley checker failed to check the top of every other page, which plainly states my name is Joe.

6/15
I go on a whirlwind tour of Michigan with fellow authors Robert W. Walker and David Ellis, visiting fifteen bookstores in three days. The events we do are well-attended, but I don't really sell a lot of books. Rob and Dave do well– they not only have established fan bases, but they've got paperbacks, which are easier to move than hardcovers.

The point of the tour for me wasn't big sales, though. It was meeting the booksellers, shaking the hands, and getting my face out there. Hopefully, it's working.

6/17
I learn the ugly truth about co-op.

Much of the prominent display space in a bookstore; by the counter, on the tables, in the window, is rented by publishers using co-op money. Co-op is also used to advertise and publicize author tours and signings.

This is one of the reasons my publisher didn't want to tour me. Besides the cost of plane fare, hotels, and author escorts, the publisher also gives the bookstore co-op money. With a new author, who is only going to sell a few copies, it's a waste of money to advertise an author event.

So when my publicist calls and tells me to cancel a signing that I've set up, I can understand where she's coming from.

That doesn't mean I have to like it.

I work out a compromise of sorts. I'm allowed to drop by stores and sign stock, as long as there's no co-op involved. That means no publicity and no advertising.

But that's okay — publicity and advertising aren't going to sell my book.

I am.

6/19
A suburban mall bookstore is told by my publisher that I can't do a signing there. The manager calls me, upset, because they've already ordered a bunch of books, and have been looking forward to this event.

I tell him I'm happy to come by and sign some stock, as long as this isn't an official signing.

When I arrive, I'm shocked–they've got 100 copies of Whiskey Sour. I know, in my heart of hearts, there's NO WAY they'll ever sell all of these books.

But maybe I can.

I hang out, greet customers, show them my book. The staff is totally into it, and point people in my direction, asking everyone who comes in if they'd like to meet a famous author.

Eight hours later, we've gotten rid of 79 copies.

The staff, and I, are ecstatic. They've never had an author stay so long, or work so hard. And I've earned back $138.50 on my advance (I get 12.5% of the cover price, or $2.75, for each book sold).

6/20
Word of my success at the mall bookstore has gotten around. I get a call from the district manager of the chain, who invites me to do seven more signings.

My publicist also hears about this. "Are you doing signings? Didn't we talk about this?"

"It was just a drop-in," I tell her.

7/5
Whiskey Sour is named an Independent Mystery Bookseller Association Bestseller for June. I'm the only new author on the list–the rest are established pros.

I send every member of the IMBA a thank-you card.

7/10
Another mall drop-in, another eight hours on my feet. Sixty-two books sold.

7/14
I'm doing a mini tour of Illinois and Wisconsin. I plan a route and hit five to ten bookstores a day, unannounced, meeting employees and signing stock.

After ten days, I've visited over seventy bookstores, and I'm tired. Emotionally and physically. I never guessed how hard this was going to be.

A look at my schedule for the upcoming month finds it packed; I've got signings, conferences, events, and interviews. Plus the website, which is now getting a hundred hits a day, is taking up more time, and my email, which is overflowing, and deadlines, because I've promised stories to several different publications, and I still have to turn in the outline for my third book and write the damn thing, plus I'm also working on editing an anthology that my agent wants to rep which is due before I go to NY in a few weeks.

And, oh yeah, I vaguely remember having a wife and kids that I've been ignoring for over a month.

Then the FedEx guy shows up, with something from Hyperion. It's the cover art, for Bloody Mary. And it's beautiful.

I frame it, and put it above my desk next to the cover art for Whiskey Sour, and my life doesn't seem so out of control anymore.

This is what I want. This is what I've always wanted. I'm the luckiest guy on earth.

I check my schedule and see that I have a lot to do today. But it's gorgeous outside, and my son just got a bike, and someone has to teach him how to ride it. I take a deep breath, turn off my computer, and go spend the day with my family.

Life is pretty damn good.

For the Children (and the Adults)

I spoke at a Jr. High this morning, to a group of about 30 kids who want to be writers when they reach adulthood.

Here are the main points I hit, which don't only apply to young writers, but to all writers struggling to make it in this business.

- Write when you can, finish what you write, and submit what you finish.
- Know your genre and your market before you begin writing.
- Avoid passive voice.
- Show, don't tell.
- Use proper manuscript format.
- You can't learn from praise, but you can learn from criticism.
- Luck is more important than talent, but you can improve your luck with hard work.
- Pay attention to white space on a page; more is better.
- You need an agent if you're writing novels.
- If you write short stories or poetry, you don't need an agent. You'll also starve.
- This is a business, and a very hard business.
- Most of your future writing teachers won't be successful authors, and you can learn more about this business on your own (writing and submitting) than in school.
- Conferences are good.
- Money flows to the writer —-never pay for anything (except for conferences).
- Query letters need a greeting (Dear Ms. Jones), sucking up (I love your magazine), a brief description of the story, and a closing (hope to hear from you soon) and NOTHING ELSE.
- Read a lot.

I also did some critiques of their stories, and explaned the difference between storytelling (they were all good storytellers) and salable writing (it's not what you say but how you say it.)

When I left, I felt pretty good about the future of this profession. These kids were anxious to discuss The DaVinci Code, and James Frey, and Eragon, and they really wanted to become writers when they grew up. They took criticism well, and were willing to work hard to improve their craft. In fact, they seemed to have a lot more dedication than I did as a 12 year old.

As technology gives us more (and cheaper) way to entertain ourselves, I don't think books are in any danger of disappearing. I'm happy to report that the insatiable desire to read and to write is alive and well in the youth of today, and that the writer is every bit as important now as when I was growing up.

34 comments

Resolutions for Writers 2010

Every December I do a post about resolutions for writers, and every year I add more of them.

2006

Newbie Writer Resolutions

- I will start/finish the damn book
- I will always have at least three stories on submission, while working on a fourth
- I will attend at least one writer's conference, and introduce myself to agents, editors, and other writers
- I will subscribe to the magazines I submit to
- I will join a critique group. If one doesn't exist, I will start one at the local bookstore or library
- I will finish every story I start
- I will listen to criticism
- I will create/update my website
- I will master the query process and search for an agent
- I'll quit procrastinating in the form of research, outlines, synopses, taking classes, reading how-to books, talking about writing, and actually write something
- I will refuse to get discouraged, because I know JA Konrath wrote 9 novels, received almost 500 rejections, and penned over 1 million words before he sold a thing —and I'm a lot more talented than that guy

Professional Writer Resolutions

- I will keep my website updated
- I will keep up with my blog and social networks
- I will schedule bookstore signings, and while at the bookstore I'll meet and greet the customers rather than sit dejected in the corner
- I will send out a newsletter, emphasizing what I have to offer rather than what I have for sale, and I won't send out more than four a year
- I will learn to speak in public, even if I think I already know how
- I will make selling my books my responsibility, not my publisher's
- I will stay in touch with my fans
- I will contact local libraries, and tell them I'm available for speaking engagements
- I will attend as many writing conferences as I can afford
- I will spend a large portion of my advance on self-promotion
- I will help out other writers
- I will not get jealous, will never compare myself to my peers, and will cleanse my soul of envy
- I will be accessible, amiable, and enthusiastic
- I will do one thing every day to self-promote
- I will always remember where I came from

2007

- **Keep an Open Mind.** It's easier to defend your position than seriously consider new ways of thinking. But there is no innovation, no evolution, no "next big thing" unless someone thinks differently. Be that someone.
- **Look Inward.** We tend to write for ourselves. But for some reason we don't market for ourselves. Figure out what sort of marketing works on you; that's the type of marketing you should be trying. You should always know why you're doing what you're doing, and what results are acceptable to you.
- **Find Your Own Way.** Advice is cheap, and the Internet abounds with people telling you how to do things. Question everything. The only advice you should take is the advice that makes sense to you. And if it doesn't work, don't be afraid to ditch it.
- **Set Attainable Goals.** Saying you'll find an agent, or sell 30,000 books, isn't attainable, because it involves things out of your control. Saying you'll query 50 agents next month, or do signings at 20 bookstores, is within your power and fully attainable.
- **Enjoy the Ride.** John Lennon said that life is what happens while you're busy planning other things. Writing isn't about the destination; it's about the journey. If you aren't enjoying the process, why are you doing it?
- **Help Each Other.** One hand should always be reaching up for your next goal. The other should be reaching down to help others get where you're at. We're all in the same boat. Start passing out oars.

2008

I Will Use Anger As Fuel. We all know that this is a hard business. Luck plays a huge part. Rejection is part of the job. Things happen beyond our control, and we can get screwed.

It's impossible not to dwell on it when we're wronged. But rather than vent or stew or rage against the world and everyone in it, we should use that anger and the energy it provides for productive things.

The next time you get bad news, resolve to use that pain to drive your work. Show fate that when it pushes you, you push right back. By writing. By querying. By marketing.

I Will Abandon My Comfort Zone. The only difference between *routine* and *rut* is spelling.

As a writer, you are part artist and part businessman.

Great artists take chances.

Successful businessmen take chances.

This means doing things you're afraid of, and things you hate, and things you've never tried before.

If, in 2008, you don't fail at something, you weren't trying hard enough.

I Will Feed My Addiction. Life is busy. There are always things you can and should be doing, and your writing career often comes second.

So make it come first.

Right now, you're reading *A Newbie's Guide to Publishing*. Not *A Newbie's Guide to Leading a Content and Balanced Life*.

You want to get published and stay published? That means making writing a priority. That means making sacrifices. A sacrifice involves choosing one thing over another.

If you can't devote the time, energy, and money it takes to pursue this career, go do something else.

I Will Never Be Satisfied. Think the last resolution was extreme? This one really separates the die-hards from the hobbyists.

While an overwhelming sense of peace and enlightenment sounds pretty nice, I wouldn't want to hire a bunch of Zen masters to build an addition on my house.

Satisfaction and contentment are great for your personal life. In your professional life, once you start accepting the way things are, you stop trying.

No one is going to hand you anything in this business. You have to be smart, be good, work hard, and get lucky.

Every time you get published, you got lucky. Don't take it for granted.

When something bad happens, it should make you work harder. But when something good happens, you can't believe you earned it. Because it isn't true. You aren't entitled to this career. No one is.

Yes, you should celebrate successes. Sure, you should enjoy good things when they happen. Smile and laugh and feel warm and fuzzy whenever you finish a story or make a sale or reach a goal.

But remember that happiness isn't productive. Mankind's greatest accomplishments are all tales of struggle, hardship, sacrifice, work, and effort. You won't do any of those things if you're satisfied with the status quo.

Who do you want on your team? The kid who plays for fun? Or the kid who plays to win?

If you want this to be your year, you know which kid you have to be.

2009

This year I'm only going to add one resolution to this growing list, but if you're writing for a living, or trying to write for a living, it's an important one.

I Won't Blame Anyone For Anything. It's tempting to look at the many problems that arise in this business and start pointing fingers. This is a slippery slope, and no good can come from it.

Do agents, editors, and publishers make mistakes? Of course.

You make mistakes too.

Hindsight is 20/20, so we can all look at things that didn't go our way and fantasize about how things should have gone.

But blaming others, or yourself, is dwelling on the past. What's done is done, and being bitter isn't going to help your career.

So try to learn from misfortune, forgive yourself and others, and make 2009 a blameless year.

2010

As A Newbie's Guide to Publishing closes in on its 500th blog entry, I can't help but reflect on how much the publishing industry has changed in the seven years I've been a part of it.

Here are some new resolutions that reflect these changing times.

I Will Be Wary. The medium in which stories are absorbed is changing in a big way, and it will continue to change. 2009 will go down in publishing history as Year Zero for the upcoming ebook revolution. Writers should explore this new territory, but we need to understand that Print is still King, and any goals and dreams a writer might have regarding publication should be focused on getting into print.

That's not to say that ebooks shouldn't be explored and experimented with. They should be, and in a serious way. Erights are a very long tail —one that can potentially continue long after our lifetimes.

Don't forsake print for ebooks without understanding what you're giving up, and don't give away your ebook rights to get a print deal.

I Will Be A Pioneer. Remember the old saying about how to recognize a pioneer? They're the one with the arrows in their backs and fronts.

I've tried to be forward-thinking in my career, rather than being content with my role as a cog in a broken machine. Your best chance for longevity is to question everything, test boundaries, experiment with new ideas, and be willing to change your mind and learn from your mistakes.

Your job is to survive, by any means necessary. So pull out the arrows and forge ahead. Discover the difference between determination and stupidity by being an example for one or the other or both.

Though this may seem at odds with the previous resolution about being wary, it's actually quite simpatico.

Q: What do you call a wary pioneer? A: Still alive.

I Will Read Books. I'm surprised I haven't mentioned this in previous years. If you're a writer, you must be a reader. I don't care if you read on your Kindle, or on stone tablets. Reading, and giving the gift of reading to others, is essential. Period.

I Will Stop Worrying. Worrying, along with envy, blame, guilt, and regret, is a useless emotion. It's also bad storytelling. Protagonists should be proactive, not reactive. They should forge ahead, not dwell on things beyond their control. Fretting, whining, complaining, and bemoaning the state of the industry isn't the way to get ahead.

You are the hero in the story of your life. Act like it.

Now quit reading blogs and get some writing done.

29 comments

Community and Commitment

I had my ear pierced yesterday, and afterwards met my friend **Marcus Sakey** (**The Blade Itself**, *coming Feb 2007 St. Martins*) for dinner.

Marcus is part of a new wave of writers who know a tremendous amount about publishing, even though their first book isn't out yet.

I didn't know squat about this business before I signed my first contract, four years ago. All the *How To* books were out of date and lacking practical information about even the most basic things, like how to do booksignings or how a publishing company works. There were no blogs about the business. Writing conferences existed, but I never thought to attend them. Not many writers even had websites yet.

Prior to that contract, my writing was also done in a vacuum. No networking. No contacts. I was a slush pile success, and didn't get any help or advice or encouragement from anyone in the biz, peer or pro.

I learned about publishing the old-fashioned way, by making a lot of mistakes. In hindsight, I should have asked more questions, and gotten in touch with those more experienced. I should have reached out and made friends. Because, simply put, friends make this business a whole lot easier.

Networking, talking shop, commiserating, schmoozing, offering advice and help, and even reading and commenting on manuscripts, all can accelerate the learning curve for everyone involved. Marcus realizes this. So do many other new writers. And as a result, his expectations are more realistic, his goals more grounded, and his X-Factor —that elusive luck all writers need in order to succeed —is tuned for maximum potential.

I met with Marcus for dinner so we could critique and brainstorm. We're each working on projects, and we read each other's prior to the meeting, so we could discuss ways to make each stronger.

I do this with several other authors as well. It's win-win. Not only does it reduce the rewrite time, but it accelerates the learning curve because you can learn as much critiquing as you can being critiqued.

It was a productive dinner for both of us —we each found ways to make our projects stronger, and we found them much quicker than if we'd been working solo.

Midway into the evening, Marcus commented on my new piercing, and mentioned he didn't see me as the earring type. And he's right, I'm not the earring type. I got an earring as part of my Halloween costume, and will remove it on November 1st.

Marcus immediately understood, as if it made perfect sense to permanently modify your body for a costume accessory. He recognized the value of committing to something fully, even if it didn't make a lot of sense. I had a costume idea, and I didn't pursue it half-assed. I went all-in (using a poker term.) I had a goal, and did whatever was necessary to reach that goal.

So what does this lame and sketchy analogy really mean?

If you're a writer, it's important to learn as much as you can about this business. But before you even do that, you have to have the commitment. You can't be afraid of your friends and family thinking you're silly for pursuing you goals. You can't write once a week, take an occasional writing class, and believe that will be enough to land you a contract. And you can't do zero promotion, thinking that all you have to do is write a good book and leave it to your publisher to sell it.

In other words, stop making excuses and go pierce your damn ear.

Okay, lecture over. Now I have to go rinse with the sanitizing solution...

28 comments

No Vacation for You

I haven't had a vacation in four years, and I don't expect one next year either.

This July, my family demanded some 'together time' so I took them up to a cabin in Michigan. Along the way I did signings. And I brought my laptop.

My two closest friends, whom I've known for 26 years, coerced me into taking a three day weekend off to go on brewery tours. I went with them, but managed to fit in a library event while they were boozing it up.

The kids have been off school for a week, and I managed to do some bonding. But I also did some editing, some writing, some website updating, and a few blog entries.

Am I missing out on life? In a word: Yes. And since misery loves company, I want you to miss out too.

- Can't find an agent?
- Can't sell your book?
- Getting a lot of rejections?
- Stuck on that short story?
- Book not selling well?
- Disappointed by your numbers?
- Haven't finished that novel?
- Unable to find a new publisher?

My question for you is: ***How much time have you put in?***

Remember listening to your grandparents talk about the Great Depression? They used words like "Sacrifice" and "Hard work."

Writing involves sacrifice and hard work. That means denying yourself some things, like friends and family and free time. If you want to make it, you have to put in the hours.

I'm not going to argue that your writing is more important than your children —-that isn't true. Family is far more important than career. But if your family loves you, they'll also understand how important your career is, and give you time to pursue it.

If you want to succeed in this biz, be prepared to make sacrifices and find the time to get things done.

Here's a handy list of some things you can sacrifice:

- Vacation
- Friends
- TV
- Going out
- Reading

- Surfing the Internet
- Sleep
- Eating

The harder you work, the better your chance at success. This is a business about persistence, not talent. Asimov wrote 400 books. James Reasoner just finished his 185th. How many have you done?

Now I fully expect some vehement disagreement. Replies that speak of values and priorities and happiness and importance, and examples of authors on the bestseller list who take plenty of time off. I'm sure plenty of folks will feel sorry for my family, or for me for not 'getting it.' Some of you will insist you can have your cake and eat it too, and some of you may indeed do that.

But the next time you're lamenting your career, ask yourself two questions: ***What have I done so far?*** & ***What have I sacrificed?***

If you've never finished a novel, have only gotten 50 rejections, and plan on using the holiday break to relax, are you entitled to the disappointment you feel about the state of your writing career? Or if you published your book, then did minimal self-promotion, can you really feel betrayed that you sold so poorly?

Here's an axiom that no one likes, me included, but I adhere to it anyway:

"You can always do more."

And the next time you're relaxing, pick up a copy of Who's Who, or crack open a history book, and look at all of the successful, famous people that our society reveres. How many of them are in there for being good parents? For taking vacations? For watching a lot of television? For partying with friends?

Happy Holidays! I gotta get back to work.

44 comments

The "Are You a Hack?" Quiz!

You must answer *yes* or *no* or pick one of the choices offered.

No *maybes* or *I dunnos* allowed.

As Winston Churchill said: We've already established you're a whore, we're just quibbling over price...

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THE *"ARE YOU A HACK?"* QUIZ

1. Is commercial success your goal?
2. Would you ever write a movie or TV novelization?
3. What's more important: Integrity or making a living as a writer?
4. Do you rewrite based on editor or agent suggestions even if you don't entirely agree with those suggestions?
5. Would you ever write an adaptation of a comic book or videogame?
6. Would you ever change the ending of your book in order to make a sale?
7. Would you write about something you didn't care about if you got a fat paycheck?
8. If forced to choose, would you rather have artistic integrity or fame and riches?
9. Would you rather be Dan Brown, author of The DaVinci Code, or Marilynne Robinson, winner of the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for Literature?
10. Would you rather be known as a genius by hundreds of people, or mediocre by millions of people?
11. Would you ever write for a character you didn't create?
12. What's more important: Getting the words right, or getting the words sold?
13. Would you write in a genre you don't enjoy for a lot of money?
14. Have you ever submitted something that you know isn't your best work in order to make a deadline?
15. What is more important: Fans or awards?
16. Would you rather have a bestseller that is critically panned, or a poor seller that is critically praised?
17. Would you ever ghost-write another author's series?
18. Did this quiz amuse you, or annoy you?

— — — — — — — — — — — —

ANSWERS

Webster defines a hack as: a writer who works on order; also : a writer who aims solely for commercial success.

To grade this test, check your answers with the key below, and keep track of how many times you scored as a "HACK" and how many times you scored as an "ARTIST."

1. Yes - HACK. No - ARTIST

2. Yes - HACK. No - ARTIST
3. Making a living - HACK. Integrity - ARTIST
4. Yes - HACK. No - ARTIST
5. Yes - HACK. No - ARTIST
6. Yes - HACK. No - ARTIST
7. Yes - HACK. No - ARTIST
8. Fame & riches - HACK. Integrity - ARTIST
9. Dan Brown - HACK. Marylinne Robineson - ARTIST
10. Medicore - HACK. Genius - ARTIST
11. Yes - HACK. No - ARTIST
12. Words sold - HACK. Words right - ARTIST
13. Yes - HACK. No - ARTIST
14. Yes - HACK. No - ARTIST
15. Fans - HACK. Awards - ARTIST
16. Critically panned bestseller - HACK. Critically acclaimed poor seller - ARTIST
17. Yes - HACK. No - ARTIST
18. Doesn't count.

— — — — — — — — — — — —

SCORING

- 0-1 HACK answers: you are an ARTIST whose integrity is solid.
- 2-3 HACK answers: you are an ARTIST who realizes that publishing is a business
- 4-5 HACK answers: you have some artistic integrity, but you'd rather make a living
- 6-14 HACK answers: you are a hack, but may have some integrity left
- 15-17 HACK answers: welcome to hacksville, population: you

40 comments

The Five Habits of Highly Neurotic Authors

Admit it —-if you write for a living, or strive to write for a living, you're probably a basket case.

Part of the problem is that writing is such a fickle profession. It's impossible to break into, with a tremendous failure rate.

Another part of the problem is that artistic types tend to be right brained, which means they are moody at best, psychotically bi-polar at worst. Selling your art comes with a lot of egotistical baggage, some of it good, most of it bad.

Here are five traits I've noticed in writers. Do any of them describe you?

Depression - Rejection hurts. It never stops hurting. Unfortunately, rejection is a part of the business. Being told that our work and our efforts aren't good enough can really play hell with the healthiest of egos. Especially if it is long term.

My Advice - Allow yourself to hurt. Go ahead and get down on yourself. Commiserate with friends. Stay in bed. Drink too much. Then move on. Never dwell for more than a day on being rejected. Instead, jump back on the horse and try again. I've heard JA Konrath was rejected 450 times and had 9 unpublished novels. If he can do it, so can you.

Insecurity - It's easy to believe that you aren't good enough, that you'll never succeed. After all, the odds are against you. Why even bother finishing that book? It won't sell anyway. Besides, your mother/spouse/teacher/writer's group told you it isn't any good. It's best never to submit anything. And if you are published, it's best to never promote yourself. Because, ultimately, you're just going to fail.

My Advice - Confidence isn't the absence of insecurity; it's never allowing insecurity to prevent action. It's never easy to show people your story, or speak in front of a crowd, or give an interview. But that doesn't mean the world has to know. You can fake confidence, and no one will know it isn't the real thing. And, strangely enough, faking confidence usually leads to real confidence, and there's really no difference between the two. Be the person you want to be, not the person you fear you are, and you will become that person.

Obsessiveness - Of course you check your Amazon ranking four times a day. Of course you torture yourself over how soon you should send a follow-up query to an agent or editor you haven't heard back from. Of course you Google yourself. Of course you travel everywhere with a laptop/Blackberry/PDA/Cell phone that allows you 24 access to the Internet so you can see if anyone has responded to your comment on **Backspace**. This is your career, and you're entitled to obsess about it —even if that obsession turns you into one of BF Skinner's pigeons, pecking at a lever hoping for a treat.

My Advice - I spent two months on tour, with limited email access. I survived. Cut the umbilical cord and realize that your career will continue without you watching over it every second of the day. Not every person who talks about you needs a personal response, and a few jackasses writing snotty reviews on Amazon won't hurt your sales. Walk away from the computer every once and a while. You'll feel much better.

Egomania - At one point or another, we all feel very good about ourselves. Maybe it's after writing something we love, or getting a good review, or signing a contract, or seeing our name in print. Beware the sense of entitlement that can piggyback on this pride; the feeling that good things are happening because you truly deserve it, or because you're better than everyone else.

My Advice - Chances are, if you're an egomaniac, you don't know it. Some signs to watch out for are:

- In conversation or correspondence, the topic is almost always about you.
- Anyone has ever called you 'smug,' 'condescending,' or 'unsympathetic.'
- You believe that your success has nothing to do with luck.
- You know that you're better than other writers.
- You truly believe your way is the only way.

If you find yourself thinking or acting like this, plan on quickly losing friends and having the world collectively cheer when you fall on your ass. Don't confuse confidence with cockiness —-people respond to humility much more than they resond to superiority.

Obliviousness - None of us are born understanding the dynamics of writing and publishing. We often do the same thing over and over again, hoping for different results. We refuse to listen to the advice of others. We have goals but haven't fully thought out how to meet them. We think that publishing is something that it actually isn't. And we hope it will all work out anyway.

My Advice - Learn all you can about the craft and business of writing. So many writers I meet, even bestselling pros, are amazingly naive, and content to stay that way. You're not doing yourself any good with your head in the clouds. Figure out how the industry works, and where your place is within it. Set attainable goals. Expect reasonable results. Try different things and learn from your failures and successes. Ignorance isn't bliss —-it's death.

17 comments

Crush Your Hope

I believe that worry, guilt, and regret are pretty useless emotions.

Worrying doesn't fix anything, guilt doesn't help anything, and regret doesn't change anything.

I'd like to add another emotion to this list; hope.

Don't get me wrong. Hope is part of what fuels us as writers, and as human beings. We all want to see our books on the NYT list, have Oprah recommend us, have mile long signing lines and huge advances.

But like those other emotions, hope is a reaction rather than an action. We hope for things to happen when we don't have control over them, and then our hopes often get crushed. That leads to doubt, depression, and a bunch of other unhealthy emotions.

Consider a marathon runner. She trains, and practices, and conditions, and keeps at it until she can, indeed, run a marathon. There's no hope involved, only determination.

Now you could say that a marathon runner is in control of her future, because success doesn't involve other people. Writers need agents and publishers and sales reps, because they can't succeed without them.

That may be true, but we can still learn a few things from the marathon runner:

1. Set Goals Within Your Control. You have control over how many pages you write per week, how many submission you make per month, your marketing plan, and how you budget your professional time.

2. Understand Expectations. Whenever you do anything in publishing, you should have a clear idea of why you're doing it, and what results will be acceptable to you. Know what these results are before attempting anything, and you can never be disappointed.

3. Push Yourself. You don't know your limits until you go past them. Don't let anyone, including you, tell you what you can and can't do. You need to find out what you're capable of by doing it, not by guessing.

4. Learn From Your Mistakes. Actually, there's no such thing as a mistake if you learn from it. Evolution involves stress and failure —it's the only way to become stronger.

5. Know the Competition. You aren't competing with me, or Dan Brown, or the people your writer's group. The only competition you have is with yourself. If you work hard, you can always get better. Getting better is always good.

As I've said many times, success will ultimately come down to luck. But luck favors those prepared for it. You may not have control over the publishing world, but you do have control over how you act, and how you react. Don't waste your time hoping for success. Instead, like a marathon runner, you should be training for it.

20 comments

Damning You With Praise

When you're a kid, if your parents were any good, they'd ooh and aah over the construction paper artwork you brought home, and put it on the refrigerator.

As you get older, the praise tapers off. Not only from your parents, but from the world in general. Grades take the place of gold stars on your homework, and the few things that you get praised for require harder and harder work.

Finally, as an adult, praise comes in the form of money. A better job, a raise, a promotion. "Atta boys" are reduced to softball games. Criticism is the primary motivator for self-improvement. Which is fine, because you can't get better unless you know what you're doing wrong.

Writers, and most artists, tend to have gotten stuck in the childhood phase of needing approval.

Art, by definition, requires an audience. So writers are forced to seek approval. Friends and family. A writing group. Agents. Editors. Reviewers. Critics. Fans. Peers.

And if the artist gets lucky, approval arrives in the form of praise, money, or both.

So does criticism. The publishing world isn't a big refrigerator, and many people aren't interested in giving you gold stars. There will be fan letters and awards nominations, but there will also be bad reviews and people who dislike your work.

It doesn't take a psychiatrist to figure out that a career that requires the continuous approval of others isn't the best way to mental health. Which is why many creative types tend to be a little on the wacko side.

If you're a writer, can you ever feel good about yourself and your work? Can you take pride in a book that never got published? Can you see the worth of a novel that got critically panned?

Or do the fans, the awards, and the money make you somehow better than the rest of the world? Does the fact that you have half a million books in print and a six figure contract function the same way as your picture on the fridge?

Both are slippery slopes, and neither leads anywhere worthwhile. The more people you allow to have power over your feelings, the less in control of your feelings you are.

Here are some rules I follow to stay even-keeled.

- **Celebrate success.** Whether it is signing a book deal or finishing a short story, you're allowed to feel good about yourself and your accomplishments.

Beware-Feelings of entitlement.

- **Let Praise Wash Over You.** It's great to have fans, but don't believe your own hype. Having lots of strangers love you doesn't make you a better person.

Beware-Getting a big head.

- **Listen to Criticism.** But don't take it personally. Ever. Good critcism is meant to help you improve, not hurt you.

Beware-Those who have agendas. They're easy to spot. They are either insulting you, or praising you while asking for money. Remember that money flows toward the writer.

- **Have Smart Goals.** Smart goals are ones you can control. Everything else isn't a goal —-it's a wish. Wishes don't lead to happiness.

Beware-Setting unattainable goals.

- **Use Your Support Group.** We all need an "atta boy" once and a while. Get this from people you're close to, people you care about. No one else matters.

Beware-Relying on anyone too much.

- **Allow yourself to be disappointed.** Then get over it. Allowing failure to consume you will ruin your career. Take a day or two to feel crummy, then move on.

Beware-Licking wounds instead of working.

- **Leave Your Name Alone.** Checking Amazon ranking, Googling yourself, checkign newsgroups and blogs for mention of you, searching for reviews —-this is all external validation by stangers and meaningless.

Beware-Self-obsession.

- **Don't Compare Yourself to Others.** Everyone has a different journey, and there is no competition. Coveting the advances, awards, print runs, and movie deals of your peers isn't going to do you or them any good.

Beware-The green-eyed monster.

- **Remember Who You Are.** Once you become a public figure, many people will say many things about you. None of them will know you as well as you know yourself. Praise and criticism are external, but true pride comes from within.

Strive to be the kind of person that you admire.

Thanks to Jude, Chidder, Jeri, and J. Carson Black for their suggestions in adding to this blog entry.

47 comments

Dealing With Discouragement

It happens to the best of us.

We start out wide-eyed and optimistic, hoping for the best. We work hard, we do everything we believe we're supposed to do, and even go above and beyond the call of duty.

But no matter how good your book, how supportive your publisher, how enthusiastic everyone is —-bad things still happen.

Publishing is a tough business. Staying idealistic is impossible. Sooner or later, something is going to disappoint you.

Perhaps your agent, thrilled to work with you when you signed on, doesn't seem to be answering your email with the same energy or frequency.

Perhaps your publisher cuts promotional dollars, or print runs.

Perhaps your numbers are getting smaller, or aren't where everyone hoped they'd be.

Perhaps you didn't get nominated for that award like you'd hoped, or get reviewed in a certain publication.

Perhaps your book(s) go out of print, or your contract doesn't get renewed.

Perhaps you agent can't sell your latest.

Perhaps your career is in a slump.

The list goes on. Success in this business takes a staggering amount of luck, and no matter how much you do, it still may not be enough.

Here are some tricks to dealing with the discouragement inherent in this profession.

Act Successful. This may sound like "put on a happy face" but the fact is, if your career is taking a downswing only a few people know about it. Your fans, your peers, and most of the publishing world has no idea your last book didn't do as well as expected, or that your agent isn't taking your calls.

Projecting confidence, showing the public you're a winner, goes a very long way.

Get Busy. Worry, regret, and guilt are useless emotions. They do nothing to help you. If you're discouraged about something, the best remedy is to act. Write. Promote. Write. Promote. Keep repeating this.

Depression can derail you. The only way to combat that is to get back on the horse and ride even harder.

Plan. Like chess, you should always be thinking several moves ahead. What you did in the past may not have worked out. Learn from it, and figure out what to do next. Maybe you need to change agents, or publishers, or genres. Do some soul searching, pinpoint what the problem is, and brainstorm solutions.

Vent. Talking about problems not only makes them feel better, it helps you deal with them. But you should limit this kind of talk to a few close, discreet friends. Keep your dirty laundry private.

Forgive. Both yourself, and those you believe have wronged you. Keeping all that venom stored up can poison you. Let it go, and move on. Blaming people for your problems won't change the situation.

Remember. You became a writer for a reason. It's easy to lose sight of that when something discouraging happens. Remember why you chose this path, because chances are good those reasons are still valid.

Of course, the most important thing to remember is:

Time Heals All Wounds.

We all have setbacks, and when they occur they may seem insurmountable. But you'll get through them. You always do. And you become stronger, smarter, and better because of them. Today's tragedy is next year's fond memory.

The scariest thing about this profession —the uncertainty —is also one of the coolest. You never know what will happen.

Some of what will happen will be good. Guaranteed. And the bad things that have happened will make for a terrific story to tell newbies some day...

19 comments

Holy Sense of Entitlement, Batman!

Why do artists in general, and writers in particular, think the world will bow down and kiss their asses simply because they wrote a book?

Writers *want* to write. We do it because we love it.

How many people have careers that they truly love? How many people have the opportunity to turn their words into money, their passion in a career?

I love being able to write for a living. But I'm not so shortsighted that I believe writing alone will be enough to guarantee success. I don't consider that writing a "good book" is where my responsibilty ends. That's where it begins.

I don't understand anyone who indulges in creative pursuits and then doesn't expect to have to do anything else in order to support their endeavors. That sense of entitlement is outdated and dangerous.

If you want to become a lawyer, there's a lot you have to do that you won't like. There is also a lot that will be expected of you. The same goes for any profession.

If writing is your profession, how can you honestly expect the rules to change? That simply writing a good book will guarantee all of your ducks will line up?

Once you try to sell something, you become a salesperson. There is NO OTHER WAY TO LOOK AT IT.

You don't want to sell your book? Keep it in a drawer. Print up copies for your family and friends. Bequeth it to your children. I applaud you for your integrity and lack of compromise.

But if you WANT TO GET PAID, that requires you to sell your book. And you don't simply sell it to your agent. You sell it to your publisher, your publisher's sales reps, your publisher's marketing department, your distributors, your regional buyers, and finally, your customers.

If you want to be a writer, LEARN HOW TO SELL.

You don't have to, of course. You can leave that up to other people. You can take a hands-off approach to your career, and hope it all works out. Many have done so.

Many have also failed. Many more have failed than have succeeded.

But some do succeed. I think about these people a lot.

I think about Jack Canfield, handselling the first Chicken Soup book at mall chain stores, popping balloons to get people's attention.

I think about Janet Evanovich, every year loading up her bus and travelling cross country to meet 1000s of fans.

I think about David Morrell, who manages to tour and attend every major writing conference every year and still be co-president of ITW.

I think about Barry Eisler, who considers his publisher a business partner instead of an employer, and gets treated the same way in return.

I think about David Ellis, who has a great publisher (Putnam) but still sent out over 200 ARCs with handwritten letters in order to get more reviews for his last book —-a tactic that paid off.

I think about Mitch Albom, and his relentless radio campaign which started an empire.

I think about Tim Dorsey, who just did his 400th event.

I think about James Patterson, Clive Cussler, Nora Roberts, and Tom Clancy, who release several books a year because they know the more you have out there, the more that will sell.

I think about Julia Spencer-Fleming, who hasn't let winning every major award in the mystery field stop her from relentlessly self-promoting. Julia's books are huge critical successes. But she refuses rest on those laurels.

I think about MJ Rose, who has applied her advertising experience to the book world with tremendous results.

And there are dozens more. None of them ever said, "All I need to do is write a good book, and the rest will be taken care of." What they said was, "Write a great book, then do everything within your power to make sure that people read it."

Of course, there are also stories about those who became huge successes without considering the sales aspect of the business. Those who simply write a book and then wind up on the bestseller list without doing anything else.

It happens. They got lucky.

I also hope to get lucky. But I think that getting lucky is damn hard work.

34 comments

Future Tactics

The way to climb Mt. Everest is one step at a time.

The way to build the pyramids is one stone at a time.

Yet some writers believe that they can write one book, and it will catapult them past the pyramids, past Everest, to the top of the charts, with no dues paid, no steps taken, no stones lain.

It happens sometimes.

So does being struck by lightening while being attacked by sharks and simultaneously winning the lottery.

Luck occurs. But it favors the prepared.

This is a marathon, not a sprint.

The only way to win a marathon is to push yourself as hard as you can. Everyone else is simply trying to finish. To win takes something special.

It all begins with setting and achieving goals. Aim too high, you fail. Aim too low, and you won't even attain last place.

How are you training for this marathon?

My questions to my fellow writers, both newbies and published:

1. What have you done today to further your career?
2. What will you accomplish by the end of this week?
3. What are your goals for the end of the month?
4. On December 31, what will you have accomplished to win this marathon?

Greatness involves a plan. Have you thought about yours?

28 comments

Excuses, Excuses

That JA Konrath guy is out of his mind. Doesn't he understand that his attitude is all wrong? How can he expect writers to devote as much time to self-promotion as he is? Doesn't Joe know that:

- I have a full time job other than writing.
- I have a family/kids/a husband/pets/plants that need my attention.
- I'm painfully shy and can't speak in public.
- I'm not good at sales —-that's why I became a writer.
- It's the publisher's job to sell books.
- I don't like self-promoting.
- All I need to do is write a good book, and people will automatically buy it.
- It wasn't like this years ago.
- If he keeps spouting this crap, publishers will begin to expect it from me.
- The only thing that matters in this business is luck.
- The only thing that matters in this business is talent.
- I have no power: publishers make bestsellers through huge promotion campaigns.
- It's terrible that I should even have to consider any of this stuff.
- Self-promotion doesn't really help anyway.
- The only reason he says this garbage is to get attention.
- My agent/editor/fortune teller/pet rock/God told me I didn't have to self-promote.
- He's setting the bar waaaaaay too high.
- I can succeed without doing any of this.
- I can succeed only doing a tiny bit of this.
- I'm smarter and I know better.
- My publisher is my employer, not my business partner.
- He's a jerk, and jerks never give good advice.
- I need my advance money to pay my bills.
- This business isn't nearly as hard as he makes it out to be.
- (INSERT NAME HERE) is a bestseller, and he/she doesn't do any self-promotion.
- If his books were better, he wouldn't have to self-promote.
- If his publisher was behind him, he wouldn't have to self-promote.
- It's funny how clueless he really is.
- All I want to do is write, and that should be enough.

Did you read Joe's latest blog entry? What crap! He wants me to ask myself the following questions:

1. What do I think will happen if my book has a poor sell-through?
2. How long will my publisher keep buying my books if they aren't making money?
3. Is it easier to sell the first book, or the fourth?
4. Why am I midlist, and can I do something about it?
5. Why do so many good books go out of print?
6. Why do so many good authors get dropped by their publishers?

7. Am I the captain of my own ship?
8. Why do I think I'll still have a writing career in ten years? Five years? Next year?
9. Do I need to think about marketing *before* I write the book?
10. What if I can't sell my next book? What should I do then?

I'm never reading Joe's blog again. And I'm not buying any of his books either: **Whiskey Sour**, **Bloody Mary** (in paperback June 1) or **Rusty Nail** (in hardcover and on audio June 30.)

And I'm really not going to buy **Thriller - Stories to Keep You Up All Night** edited by James Patterson, because he's got a story in that anthology.

And I certainly won't buy him a drink if I see him at **Thrillerfest** or **Bouchercon**.

And I'm really going to stop reading his **blog** because it drives me nuts. Really. I am. I promise.

But first I have to respond to that last asinine entry...

55 comments

Milestones

Throughout the course of a career, a writer reaches many milestones. These milestones have a certain order, more or less, and each time one is reached is a cause for celebration.

Today I reached one of those milestones, which got me thinking about the past ones, and the joy I've gotten from them. They include:

Writing my first novel. Few things in life offer the satisfaction of finally writing "The End" when finishing a book. I've written fourteen others since then, and it's still always a thrill for me.

Selling my first short story. The first time I was actually paid for my words, and saw my name in print, felt great. I still get a kick out of this when it happens.

Getting an agent. It's so hard to find an agent, especially a good one. I'm going on seven years now with mine, and I'm still lucky to have her.

Landing my first book deal. This is perhaps the biggest milestone of all. One day I was a normal guy. The next day I was a novelist. I've had subsequent book deals since then, but nothing will ever beat the first one.

Earning out my advance. As of today, my first three books (Whiskey Sour, Bloody Mary, and Rusty Nail) are officially in the black. My first contract was basketed; a joint accounting clause which stated I wouldn't earn a dime until all three novels earned out the entire advance. Well, now they have. I'm actually earning royalties. And it feels wonderful.

According to my sources, earning out an advance isn't easy. One out of six books published makes money, sometimes quite a bit. One out of six earns out, just breaking even. And four out of six never earn out.

My books are making money, and seem to be on the path to keep making money.

I'd love to attribute this milestone to my tireless efforts at promoting, or the stellar quality of my writing, but in truth it really comes down to luck. Sure, I tried to write good books, and I've certainly worked hard to promote them (as has my publisher.)

But there are also authors who work their butts off and don't earn out, and there are a lot of authors who are wildly successful without doing much promotion at all.

Right now, though, I'm not thinking about hard work or luck. I'm simply happy that, nearing the fourth anniversary of me signing my first three-book deal, I'm actually getting a check, and a decent one at that.

Hopefully, there are other milestones ahead. Besides new books, and new contracts, I'm hoping to one day crack the bestseller lists, sell a movie option, sell more foreign rights, and sell book club rights. And, if I ever reach those milestones, I'm sure more milestones will replace them.

In the meantime, drinks are on me. If you've never seen me before, I'm the guy sitting there with the big-ass grin on his face.

44 comments

For Those About To Give Up...

Meanwhile, in the NFL....

Coach: OK, guys. The first half was a little rough.

Player #1: Rough?!? We're getting creamed 78 to 3!

Coach: I understand that.

Player #2: The other team is killing us, coach! We're being humiliated!

Coach: I know. That's because they have a better owner, who spent more money on getting better players. It's hard to hear, but it's true. They also have a better coaching staff. It's all about the benjamins.

Player #3: So what do we do? How do we win?

Coach: We're not going to win. It's not within our power.

Player #1: Huh?

Coach: There's nothing any of us can do to win. It's up to the owner. He didn't come through with the cheddar, so we might as well give up.

Player #2: Isn't there anything we can do?

Coach: Nope.

Player #3: What about trying harder?

Coach: Won't work. We don't have the support of the owner. Without that influx of money and talent, we're all just spinning our wheels.

Player #1: But I'm a great player! I was on the all star team!

Player #2: I was a first round draft pick!

Player #3: I won awards!

Coach: It's not enough.

Player #2: What about heart? Effort?

Coach: None of that matters.

Player #1: This is a pretty shitty halftime speech, coach.

Coach: Why? it should be liberating. Once you know that you can't win, that success isn't possible, you can absolve yourself of blame.

Player #3: But we want to win.

Coach: Too bad. There's simply nothing you can do.

Player #2: We can refuse to give up. We can analyze what we've done before, and adjust our tactics. We can brainstorm new plans. We can keep trying our best.

Coach: Won't matter. You're doomed to fail. Only the owners can decide who wins. You don't have the power. Think of all the football players who play the game. Only a few are winners. We can't all be winners. You should accept that. In fact, if I were you, I wouldn't even finish this game. I know I'm not going back out there. What's the point?

Player #1: Well, when you put it that way, it sort of makes sense.

Player #3: Yeah. I mean, if we don't have any control anyway, why should we bother trying?

Coach: Now you're getting it. Forgive yourself this humiliating defeat. It isn't your fault. It's the owner's fault. Now who wants to go out and get ice cream?

Player #2: But we still have a game to finish!

Coach: There's no point. Nothing you do matters.

Player #2: But we can still try! We can still play our best!

Player #3: I'm getting Rocky Road.

Player #1: And a waffle cone. I love waffle cones.

Player #2: Guys! Come back! It's your names on the backs of those jerseys! This is your career! You're responsible for your success, not the owners! Guys...?

Announcer: Remember kids, success isn't up to you. Nothing you do to help your life matters, so you might as well give up now. Trying is for the ignorant. So just cross your fingers, and hope the money people get behind you.

This has been a public service message by PWUEIHW (People Who Use Excuses Instead of Hard Work.)

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There will be people in life who tell you you're not going to make it.

And there will be times in life where you think your efforts are in vain.

Once you start making excuses rather than trying your best, you've lost.

You may not be able to guarantee the outcome.
But you can guarantee your best effort.

Now go get 'em, tiger.

32 comments

Get Off Your Ass and Do Something

Are you a writer? Here are your goals for the day:

1. Write. One thousand words is good. Two thousand is better.
2. Update your blog and website. Appearances, new info, contests, games, stories, articles, pictures, etc.
3. Edit something. Your stuff, or a friend's stuff —either will help you improve as a writer.
4. Send out a query letter to sell a story or article. Getting published is your best form of advertising.
5. Expand your Internet presence. Leave messages and comments on listserves, blogs, boards, newsgroups, chatrooms. Trade links. Submit work to writing websites.
6. Set up an event. Sign up for a conference, contact a library, schedule a booksigning, speak at your local Rotary club, teach a class —-get out there and meet some people.

Try to do as much of the above as you can, every single day. At the very least, you should be doing one or two of them. EVERY. SINGLE. DAY.

This is your year, remember? You aren't going to become a household name nursing your hangover, watching cable.

You're a writer, dammit. Act like one.

22 comments

A Discouraging Word

You ever notice how when someone says, "I never do this" it means they are just about to do whatever it is they're speaking about?

Well, I never quote my email. Until now.

I get a lot of email of the, "Joe you're an inspiration" variety. I love getting this type of email, because it means I'm not just screaming into the wind. I used to joke that I was an inspiration to dozens. I now hear from dozens a month.

But this email really threw me, and I'm not sure how to react to it:

I just read your entire 'tips' series on your site http://www.jakonrath.com/tips.html (including the video). Very informative and entertaining. This should be required reading for anyone considering writing as a career.

Thank you, sincerely, thank you for sharing your experience, and for the sheer volume of useful, real-world information about writing and the publishing industry. Based on what I have learned, I have decided to burn my own book before it is even finished (I will have to print it out first), and as a replacement, take up Everquest as my life's pursuit.

I will also pick up copies of all your books, as payment in kind for the sage advice on my career path. It was well worth it.

signed, A Future Fan, and Former Almost-Writer

A few things hit me at once when I read this.

1. I just crushed someone's dream.
2. Am I really that scary and discouraging when I talk about this business?
3. That was a really well written letter, and this person probably has talent.

It's not a matter of opinion when I talk about how difficult publishing is. This business is brutal to get in, and brutal to stay in.

Though I only landed an agent 7 years ago, a lot has happened in the industry since then. Silly as it sounds now, when I was breaking in the Internet was still on the fringe of mainstream. Most agents and authors didn't have websites. There were no bloggers giving advice, telling me how the system actually worked. There were no huge writing websites or forums. The only way to talk to pros was through snail mail that took months.

For the newbie writer, the Internet is manna from heaven.

But is this information empowering, or discouraging? Do you require a certain amount of ignorance to slay the dragon, because you'd never even attempt it if you knew every single fact? Or is being forewarned being forearmed?

I've said before that wasting your life on impossible goals only leads to anger, frustration, discouragement, and depression. But in this society, we idolize people who beat the odds. We love the underdog stories, the "you'll never walk again" guy who wins in the Olympics, the "you're an awful singer" who winds up on MTV, the "rejected 500 times" guy who lands a three book deal. And we idolize these people for a reason —they we able to defy the odds and reach their goals, and didn't let anything stop them.

It's important to know your limitations. But it's also important to pursue your dreams. And don't let me, the Internet, or the publishing industry discourage you from trying.

You can do it. I'm proof.

36 comments

Happiness and the Writer

So I've been writing lately. A LOT. I've just finished my second book this year, and now I'm playing ketchup with my blog/website/email/myspace.

Now that I'm back in the swing of things, I've been thinking a lot about why I became a writer. My answer is probably the same as yours: I love to write.

And yet these past few months haven't been easy. In fact, in the spirit of full disclosure, even though I spent almost all of my time writing (not much self-promotion, not much marketing) I really haven't been that happy lately.

So what gives? I got my wish, landed the big publishing deal, and am living my dream. Shouldn't I wake up every morning with a smile on my face and a "I'm so lucky to be alive" attitude?

Yes, methinks, I should. I should be happier than I've ever been in my life. But I'm not, and after thinking long and hard about this topic over several beers, I finally understand why:

Happiness isn't productive.

I just had a long conversation with the talented **Tasha Alexander**, who was very excited that she got her first royalty check, having earned out the advance on her first book. It was a very nice royalty check too. I also shared good news: On my last royalty statement, I found out I'm only $1500 away from earning out on my three-book contract. Considering my third novel, Rusty Nail, hasn't even had a paperback release yet, I'm confident by the next statement I'll have also earned out.

We congratulated each other for roughly thirty seconds, then spent over two hours openly worrying about our futures.

Q: Why couldn't we just celebrate the good things, and push aside the bad?

A: Because you don't get anything done when you're celebrating.

Worrying, on the other hand, makes you work harder, which gets things done. It helps you focus on the future, and forces you to create a plan to reach your goals.

The problem, of course, is that after you spend a year worrying and working, and you finally reach those all-important goals, you only celebrate for thirty seconds.

Which made me realize something. Happiness should come from the journey, not from reaching the destination. We spend so much of our time as writers WAITING for the big something: getting an agent, landing a book deal, getting a second contract, getting a royalty check, finishing the new novel. Instead, we should enjoy the process, rather than the just end result. After all, the process is what we have control over.

So here's a list of things we should focus on as writers, to maximize happiness and minimize stress and worry.

1. Start on the deadline early. Waiting until the last minute made me late, anxious, and more worried about page count than story conflict. Had I begun earlier, I would have enjoyed the process a lot more.

2. Set realistic goals. Focus on what you have control over. Sending out three queries a week is within your control. Selling three stories is not. Attending a booksigning and giving a good speech is doable. Selling at least 40 books at your booksigning may be out of your hands.

3. Celebrate as long as you can. Enlist your family and friends. Call people up. Go out. Congratulate yourself. Break out the champagne. Smile, darn you, smile.

4. Remember why. The sad fact is, once you've done it for a few years, writing becomes a job just like any other. But it isn't like any other job. We get paid for our words, and we ARE the luckiest folks on the planet. Remind yourself of this from time to time. Look through your old rejections. Stare at the shelf with all your published magazines. Fondle your awards (wait until you're alone first.) You've got a lot to be proud of.

5. Embrace your fans. Writers write. but they also tour, sign, promote, speak, correspond, blog, network, and interview. Interacting with fans is important, because even when you doubt yourself, they never doubt you. And they constantly remind you of who you are. We all need to be reminded every so often.

6. Help other writers. Snoopy was right. Happiness is about sharing and giving and helping. Hording your success is selfish. Share what you've learned, give a hand up to those who need it, and make yourself available to your peers. In that spirit, I'll be teaching two classes at **Sleuthfest** in Miami Beach this Thursday the 19th of April, 2007. One class is on marketing. The other is on finding an agent and selling your writing.

Can't attend? Eventually I'll post links to the handouts on my website, when I'm all caught up. In the meantime, you can email me at **haknort@comcast.net** and I'll send the handouts to you. They're 90 pages of hard-earned wisdom about this business. And they're free, of course.

I'll be back to posting on this blog two or three times a week. Thanks everyone for their patience during my work sabbatical.

Now if you'll excuse me, I'm going to go celebrate something.

20 comments

How Good Am I?

As writers, we all think we're better than we actually are.

I call this phenomenon "ugly baby syndrome." We all know people with ugly kids. Do these folks hide their children from the public? No. Proud parents that they are, these people hand out pictures of their ugly little progeny and ask the requisite, "Isn't she cute?" to all within earshot.

It's impossible to objectively view your own creation.

So when we write something, and the writing gets rejected, we all wonder what is wrong with the editor/agent/universe because they obviously don't know quality.

Unfortunately, believing in one's talents also encourages a sense of entitlement.

The fact is, you're never as good as you think you are, and no one will love your work as much as you do. Even you writers who say that you stink, you know deep down that you want someone to contradict your beliefs, to heap praise upon your work because you secretly believe it is worthwhile or else you wouldn't be writing in the first place.

As if this situation isn't volatile enough, we add Factor X to the mix.

Factor X dictates that anyone, at any time, with any degree of talent, can succeed.

There's no real rhyme or reason to success. No universal score keeper decides who gets a break and who still needs to pay their dues. There is no objective measure of talent that dictates the haves and the have nots.

We all try our best. Some make it. Some don't. Talent, experience, and hard work all may or may not be factors.

We all think we deserve success, but not all of us attain success, and there's no way to accurately judge if what we're doing is right or wrong, because we can't be objective, and because there is no clear cut path of right or wrong, no guarantees.

In fact, we might not even consider ourselves successful, even when other people believe we are.

Kind of a conundrum, ain't it? Especially since the business model for publishing, with returns and coop, is hardly ideal.

Unfortunately, all we can do is keep reminding ourselves of these three things:

1. It's our work that gets rejected or accepted, not us.
2. No one in this business really knows what they're doing.
3. All we have control over is how much we try.

34 comments

The Top Ten Signs You're Spending Too Much Time Online

10. Not only do you Google your name daily, but you also Google possible misspellings of your name.

9. Your mood fluctuates with your Amazon ranking.

8. Your main form of communication with your family is email.

7. You have a chamber pot under your desk so you don't miss anything.

6. Your computer keeps crashing because you have seven chat clients simultaneously running 24/7.

5. You've developed a callous on your mouse finger.

4. Your ass has taken on the permanent shape of your desk chair.

3. You forgot you owned a TV.

2. You've "pimped out" your MySpace page.

1. After reading this, you just *have* to share it with everyone you know.

18 comments

Losing Touch

Way back in 2002, when I was a newbie writer, things seemed a lot more important.

Getting interviewed was a big deal. I always made sure I updated my website the moment I scheduled an appearance somewhere. I prepared several days in advance for booksignings. I kept careful track of where my work was published. Getting an email from a fan would put a smile on my face for hours.

And I saved stuff. Lots of stuff. Newspaper articles about my work, reviews, convention programs, fan mail, flyers from appearances, and so on.

A lot has changed since then. I've done a lot of interviews, and lost track of most. I forget to update my appearance schedule on my website for weeks at a time. I know I have stories in upcoming anthologies and magazines, but can't remember them all, or even some of the titles. Answering fan mail has become work. And I've given up trying to save every piece of paper with my name printed on it.

Being a writer has lost much of its luster. Writing is no longer a dream. It's a job.

Mostly, this is good. I no longer obsessively Google myself or check my Amazon ranking. I trust that folks will find my interviews online without me having to link to them. I've given the same speeches and talks so often that I don't have to meticulously prepare beforehand. Instead of seeking out venues for my short stories, many venues seek me out.

But I sometimes miss that naive enthusiasm. I miss being excited by every little good thing that happens. I even miss obsessing over things I thought were really important but turned out not to be.

Wide-eyed wonder can't hold up against hard won experience.

But then Fed-Ex dropped off a box of my new paperbacks (Rusty Nail, the third Jack Daniels book) and I set one on my desk and glanced at it while I worked. Every time I saw it, I smiled. And I kept smiling for the rest of the day.

Things may not be new or fresh anymore, but they're still pretty damn cool. I just needed a reminder. Why plant roses if you don't stop to smell them every so often?

And on that note, here are three recent interviews:

http://ambasadora.livejournal.com/115992.html#cutid1

http://eijohnson4u.blogspot.com/2007/05/bestselling-author-ja-konrath-he-is.html

http://www.horrorview.com/Interview%20Files/KonrathInterview.htm

http://poesdeadlydaughters.blogspot.com/2007/02/chat-with-ja-konrath.html

I'll also be in the upcoming anthologies:

Tales From the Red Lion

Until Someone Loses an Eye

Chicago Blues

Perfectly Plum

Thriller

Buy them all, along with the paperback of Rusty Nail if you were too cheap to spring for the hardcover...

13 comments

Neurotic Author Moment

It's true. It's all true. And I'll validate it for you**.**

You have no talent.

You're never going to succeed.

Your agent isn't doing shit for you, and you won't find anyone better.

You can't make a living at this.

You're not a real writer.

Your publisher isn't behind you.

Your work-in-progress stinks.

Your peers don't respect you.

The bad reviews are true.

Everyone is doing better than you are.

You're fooling yourself.

You'll never get another contract.

The whole world knows you suck.

Your last book was better.

No one else struggles.

You need to quit, because you don't have what it takes.

Loser.

You done? Got that out of your system? Good.

Now quit being a whiny little baby and go write.

18 comments

Cinderella Boy

A year ago, I did a guest lecture gig at my alma matter, Columbia College in Chicago, for a graduate writing class.

One of the students, a guy named Marcus Sakey, offered to buy me a beer after class. We went to a nearby watering hole and began to talk shop.

Marcus wrote lit fiction, and was pursuing his Masters in the hope that one day he'd be able to write and sell a book.

I gave him my opinion —an MFA won't sell a book. Only a good book will sell a book. School and study is something you do INSTEAD of write.

I also told him that the market for lit fiction isn't very large, and asked if there were any genres he liked to read.

Marcus liked Dennis Lehane, who writes crime fiction.

"Then you need to drop out of school and write a crime novel," I said.

He picked up the check, and I promptly forgot about him. Until he showed up at an event of mine a few weeks later.

"I did it," he told me.

"Did what?" I asked. I couldn't remember who he was.

"I did what you suggested."

"Which was...?"

"I dropped out of school, stopped writing lit fiction, and am working on a thriller."

"Oh. Uh... that's great."

I'd hear from Marcus occasionally, and every so often our paths would cross. We'd talk about writing, and the publishing business, and the importance of self-promotion, and more often than not Marcus would pick up the check.

I began to like this guy a lot, not just because he kept buying me beer. He was smart, funny, and really dedicated to making it in this business. I soon considered him a friend.

Two months ago, my friend finished his first novel, called THE BLADE ITSELF.

It was good. Damn good.

Marcus queried some agents, and got two big ones interested. He signed with a great agency, who went out with his book a few weeks ago.

A few days ago, Marcus called, saying he'd gotten a modest offer.

The next day, he'd gotten a counter-offer, which was considerably better.

The day after that, he had a two book deal and was earning more money than I am.

I couldn't have been happier than if it had happened to me.

Are you a new writer, unable to break into the publishing world? Take heart. It is possible. Marcus is proof. Within a year, he went from college student to earning a living as a writer.

Look for THE BLADE ITSELF to be released by St. Martin's in January 2007.

Look for Marcus at a writing convention near you. Offer to buy him a beer, and then pick his brain about the publishing business. But don't be surprised if he tries to talk you out of getting that MFA...

28 comments

The Importance of Being You

Your opinions are correct, and worth more than the opinions of others. True or false?

True, of course. Unless there's something DSM-IV at play, your opinions are all about what works for you. While you might not always know what's best for you, you think you know what's best for you, and there's nothing wrong with standing behind that.

It's impossible to live life without making decisions, without making choices. And hopefully, you have experience or logic to back up these choices, because it's important to examine and attempt to understand why you do the things you do.

People write for many different reasons. Some want to express themselves, to be proponents of art and culture, to share their ideas and philosophies. Some want the acceptance, the exposure, the accolades, the fame, the notoriety. Some want the money, the job, the income. Some want to entertain, enthrall, delight. Some want to provoke. Some write for a combination of reasons, or for other reasons entirely.

And each reason is valid, for the writer.

The mistake that a lot of writers make is believing their reasons are the best reasons, or the only reasons, or the right reasons.

The reasons you write *are* the right reasons —-for you. They might not be right for other writers. And they certainly aren't universally important, nor should you expect them to be.

But some things are universal.

I write because I love it. But once I try to sell my writing, my personal reasons for writing come into conflict with the business of writing.

In publishing, compromises will be made. Always. Once money comes into play, the reason you write becomes twofold —-your original reason, and your obligation to your publisher.

Your publisher is buying your work because they believe they can make money from it. This is capitalism. Your publisher will expect things from you, to help them in their efforts. Contracts, deadlines, editing, rewriting, publicity, promotion, marketing, advances, subsidiary rights —-all of these suddenly come into play.

My writing philosophy is simple: Make money for your publisher.

I do this by not only doing a lot of self-promotion, but by also considering my audience even before I sit down to write a single word.

This means compromises. This means understanding the system writing exists in (the publishing business) and weighing it against the many reasons I wanted to become a writer.

Successful writers seem to understand this balance, and the trade-offs required. They realize that their books are products as well as art.

By 'successful' I mean that they are making money for their publisher. You don't have to be an NYT bestseller to do this. All you have to do is earn out your advance.

You can earn out your advance by doing a lot of self-promotion, by working closely with your publisher, by spending a lot of your advance money on marketing, and by writing good books.

The definition of 'good' is subjective, and opinions vary. My definition of good is simple: A good book is something that a complete stranger will pay money for —-enough complete strangers to earn out your advance.

What makes a book 'good' has nothing to do with anything inherent in the book. If you think you've just written a masterpiece, someone somewhere will disagree with you.

Many writers scream about how terrible certain NYT bestsellers are. How their books are crap, and how they are much better writers than Danielle Steel or Clive Cussler or Dan Brown.

Many writers scream that popular culture is a cesspool, appealing only to the lowest common denominator.

Many writers talk of art, and standards, and culture.

Many writers blame their publishers for their failures.

Many writers insist that talent alone will ensure success, and the unwashed masses need to accept them for what they are.

Many writers need to get a clue.

Dismissing successful authors serves no purpose. Though your opinion of their writing might differ from the public's opinion, it might help to try and understand why certain authors become successful.

This isn't a competition. No writer is better than any other writer. And your opinion, though valid, is subjective.

If you want to believe you're better than Stephen King, you're entitled to that belief.

But publishers won't believe that, until you sell more books than King. And all of King's fans will think you're an idiot.

The higher the horse, the bigger the fall. The reasons you write, and your books, are not more important or better than anyone else's reasons for writing, or their books.

Write for whatever reason you want to write. But disregard the business, and it's successes, at your own peril.

Opinions may vary, but numbers don't lie.

17 comments

Thanksgiving for Writers

I'm thankful that I'm a writer.

I'm thankful I have fans.

I'm thankful I can make a money at this, and that people actually pay me for my words.

I'm thankful for the support of fellow writers.

I'm thankful every time I see my name on a book spine, on a byline, in an interview, or on a blurb.

I'm thankful that I'm slightly less neurotic than I was last year.

I'm thankful for my publishers and my agents.

I'm thankful my family and friends support my dream.

I'm thankful I have the opportunity to help newbies get what I've got.

I'm thankful for my creativity.

I'm thankful my career is going well.

I'm thankful for booksellers and librarians.

I'm thankful for those who want to review me, interview me, and publicize me.

I'm thankful that the writing is still its own reward.

— — — — — — — — —

If you can't find anything to be thankful for, why are you still in this business?

When things get tough, remember how lucky you are. Also remember that no one is forcing you to do this.

You take out what you put in.

Happy Thanksgiving.

10 comments

Pride

Somewhere in the annals of history pride went from being a virtue to being a sin.

While no one likes a braggart or a boaster, and being around someone who talks about themselves constantly is a major bore, I believe that many writers became writers because of a need to show off. After all, it takes a large ego to write words down on paper and believe that others will not only enjoy them, but pay you for the privilege of reading them.

This isn't too far removed from bringing home macaroni art in the third grade and expecting Mom to tape it to the refrigerator door. And what child doesn't swell —and rightfully so —at the sight of their hard work on display for anyone who reaches for a glass of milk or a sandwich?

I know I still get a giddy feeling when I see my new book or short story in print for the first time. I love getting email from fans, and reading reviews, and hearing friends and family share how they saw someone reading one of my tomes. This is a healthy feeling. In fact, with the many problems the publishing industry has, and the many pitfalls that go hand-in-hand with being a writer, sometimes feeling good about our work is all we have.

I've written fifteen novels and over a hundred short stories. Each time I pen "the end" I feel like I'm six-years-old again, and can't wait to show my mom my latest masterpiece. I still show my mom most of what I write, but my first reader is now my wife. I haven't written anything in the past thirteen years that she hasn't read immediately afterward, and I'm incredibly lucky to have her.

I think this need to show people our work helps tremendously. Not only does it boost productivity, but it also takes some of the loneliness out of a solitary profession. I'll often write a scene, or finish a chapter, grinning because I can imagine my wife's reaction to reading it.

Unlike many other careers that people seem to fall into due to attrition, luck, or apathy, writing is a career that is sought after, cultivated, and difficult to maintain. We should have a sense of pride in every success, whether it's finishing a short story or novel, getting something published, receiving fan mail, or simply hearing the laughter of a family member reading our words in another room.

I pity writers who tortuously labor over their prose, or who can never be satisfied with any accomplishment. Perfectionism is fine, to a point. But I know that I got into writing because of the joy it held for me. If I didn't have that joy, I'd be doing something easier. For me, the writing is the fun part, but sharing that writing is also fun.

It is possible, however, to be too into your own accomplishments. This not only annoys and alienates those around you, but it's not a very healthy way to live. Newbie writers are often guilty of this. Hell, even I was, and often still am.

So here's a list of Virtues and Sins for authors, centering around Pride.

Virtues

- Feeling good when writing.
- Feeling good when finishing a piece of work.
- Feeling good when something gets published.
- Feeling good when getting positive feedback.
- Feeling good when getting a decent review.
- Feeling good after a successful signing or event.
- Sharing major successes with family and close friends.
- Offering requested help and advice to peers, without being condescending.
- Feeling good when seeing something of yours in print.
- Feeling good getting fan mail.

Sins

- Thinking you're entitled to success.
- Bragging.
- Conversations that revolve around your accomplishments.
- Posting every little thing that happens in your career on your blog, website, favorite bulletin board, etc.
- Talking down to anyone.
- Fishing for compliments.
- Sharing major and minor successes with everyone moments after they occur.
- Offering unsolicited advice to peers.
- Believing that the opposite of talking is waiting.
- Hogging the microphone and/or spotlight at multi-author events.
- Believing the hype.

That said, I'm ridiculously proud to report that Dirty Martini is my first hardcover to ever go into a second printing. Thanks so much to all of you who have bought this book —and hold onto those first editions, because they'll be worth more on eBay in a few years. :)

If you have any additions to the Pride Sins and Virtues list, I'd love to hear them, and so would your peers.

29 comments

Why?

- A need for self-expression?
- Money?
- An inflated sense of your own importance?
- Fame?
- Peer pressure?
- To change to world?
- Art for art's sake?
- A need for attention?
- To ease the pain?
- For self-gratification?
- To forget?
- To remember?
- It's better than working for a living?
- Because it's important?
- A need for acceptance?
- Because you can't stop?

Why do you write?

Would you continue to write, if your career never got better than it is now?

Would you continue to write, if your career became worse than it is now?

72 comments

Quitting

When I speak in public, I often tell the newbie writers in attendance that this business is horrible, and they should quit.

It always gets a few laughs, because they think I'm kidding.

Work hard for four years, and you can get an engineering degree. In seven years, you're a lawyer. Eight and you can practice medicine. Hard work = success.

Writing isn't like that. You can bust your butt for ten years, working every day, and not earn a dime. A BA in fiction writing means you're eligible for a job at Wendy's. An MFA means you can teach —but is no guarantee you'll sell a book. And why would you want to teach if you haven't succeeded in the field?

So when does a reasonable person say when? After how many rejections should you decide to try something new?

I've talked with writers about the anguish of writer's block. They speak of their WIPs like it is a monumental task to be conquered, a war to be fought, torture to be endured.

This is how you want to spend your free time?

I read a lot of newbie writing, and 90% of it is bad. Could it be improved? Sure. I always spout that persistence trumps talent. But it took me 12 years to sell a book, and the stuff I was writing back in the day was better than much of the newbie stuff I read. Does that mean I'm fostering hope for hundreds of writers who won't sell anything until 2025, if ever?

The odds are against you, moreso than almost any other profession. Very few have what it takes, and even if you do, lady luck may snub you anyway.

Here's a short list of reasons to quit. If you see yourself on here, it may be time to try your hand at something else.

1. You've been doing this for more than five years, and haven't sold anything.
2. You've got some kind of degree in writing, and haven't sold anything.
3. Writing causes you pain.
4. You've been working on one novel for five years.
5. You're great at starting stories, but never finish them.
6. You want to be a writer, but spend all your time going to classes and researching, but never get any writing done.
7. You could live without ever writing again.
8. You think that writing will make you rich.
9. You believe that once you sell a book, it's a cakewalk from then on.
10. You truly feel that you have something important to say.
11. You think being a writer is cool.
12. You're doing it to show your family and friends.

13. You want to win awards.
14. You believe that editing, rewriting, and revision are for the less-talented.
15. You have a thin skin.
16. You think that writing will make you famous.
17. You think that once you're in print, that will be enough and you'll never want more.
18. You think there's a conspiracy keeping you from getting published.
19. You don't live to write.
20. At the end of your life, if you're still not published, it will hurt you.

If any of the above apply to you, consider doing something else with your free time. While high school sports couches crow that quitters never win, Dirty Harry famously said, "A man's got to know his limitations."

Why torture yourself when you could do something you'd be more successful at?

The cold hard fact is: most of the people trying to get published won't get published, and most of the people who do get published won't be successful.

Which brings me to the most important point of all:

21. If this blog entry made you consider quitting, you absolutely must quit.

If all it did was rile you up, well, welcome to hell. I wish you much success.

I also recommend Prozac, alcohol, and lots of understanding friends.

41 comments

Self-Doubting Thomas

Hard topic, and something few talk about.

So I will.

Most writers I've met have secret fears. They're driven by uncertainty, and then proven in a dozen different ways.

We fear that our books won't sell. That we won't get another contract. That we'll get bad reviews. That our editors will switch houses. That our cover art will suck. That no one will show up at our signings. That our efforts are in vain.

In short, we fear failure.

That's a pretty normal thing. Most people fear failing. But writers have so many obsessive, neurotic ways to reinforce their fears.

We don't admit it, but we all do the same things, and think the same thoughts. Some of them include:

Google our own names. Most writers do this daily. Some do it hourly. Searching for another mention, another signal that we're getting our brand out there.

Check Amazon. Again, it's a daily, possibly hourly thing. We're looking for rank, to see if it's gone up or down. Watching your rank go down is like a little slap in the face. An even bigger slap is when some helpful soul gives a you one star rating for no discernible reason.

Deny success. Many writers refuse to acknowledge their own accomplishments, because they're waiting for the other shoe to drop. Or they think that success was a fluke that won't last.

Stress out. Rather than enjoying the wonderful ride we're on, writers worry about the next goal ala Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow was right —as soon as we fulfill our dreams, more dreams take their place.

Avoid humiliation. A great number of writers I know refuse to do signings. I understand why. Sitting alone at the signing table while customers walk by is awful. It's worse than not being asked to dance. It's worse than being the last kid picked for backyard football. Smiling at person after person, shaking hands, pitching your book, and getting shot down over and over again is a direct punch right in the ego.

Watch our websites. A lot of writers I know have invisible counters that show how many people have visited their sites. The obsessive ones (you know who you are) also check for length of stay, entry and exit pages, keyword activity, browser activity, system stats, visitor paths, geo-location, returning visitors, number of downloads, and on and on.

Obsess over reviews. Good ones are a cause for celebration. Bad ones can cause depression. Having none is worst of all. I know writers who don't read reviews anymore. Or at least they say they don't. I don't know how that's possible.

Envy each other. This is never mentioned, and hardly ever shown, but we all secretly wonder about our fellow authors. Why does she have a movie deal and I don't? Why is he a bestseller? Why does she make more money, and have bigger print runs, and have books in 30 different countries? Why is he in hardcover? Why does she have books on tape? Why did he get a book tour and massive publicity? The unspoken tagline is "...especially since I'm a better writer."

Hate rejection. Doesn't matter how long you've been in the biz, getting your work rejected still stings.

Dislike imposed edits. Maybe we say we love to be edited. But deep down, we all feel that what we originally wrote was right. That's why we wrote it that way. And I'm pretty sure that we're wrong, and that the editing is necessary, yet it still rankles a bit to be told something needs fixing. I have a theory that the bigger an author gets, the less editing they allow. Which is why so many bestselling authors aren't as good as they were years ago —-they refuse to be editing. (But that might just be envy talking.)

Drink. Where do you always find authors at a conference? The bar. Writing is a profession that pushes social drinking to the boundaries. Good news? We drink. Bad news? We drink. More than one writer in the room? We drink. The only thing bigger than my liver is my bladder.

Become a little conceited. Or perhaps very conceited. Having strangers tell you how much they love you is a heady experience. If it happens enough, it's very easy to believe them.

Forget where we came from. All pros were once newbies, dreaming about being published, struggling to get an agent. But once we get a key to the clubhouse, we forget how hard we struggled. A lot of writers I know make an effort to help new authors. They blurb. They teach. They critique. They make themselves accessible. But some don't. They're at the top, but they haven't sent the elevator back down.

If you're a published writer, you might look at these things and think, "How did Joe know?"

Or you might look at these things and deny them all.

If you're not published yet, you might look at these things and think, "I'll never do any of that."

But I'd put good money on the fact that you will.

3 comments

Self Image

How we view ourselves and how the world views us are two different things.

A few ago years ago, I had a close friend whose writing career was in a bit of a slump. Naturally, he was depressed about this. And he had a right to be. His first book didn't perform to publisher expectations, and they released his second book without much support. One of the big chains didn't even carry it.

I'd like to point out here that I've read his work, and it's terrific. Everyone who reads it agrees. And he busted his hump promoting, traveling, and spreading the word about his books.

But fate gave him the finger, and his best efforts didn't bring him success.

In a long letter, he told me that he had lost hope. But he ended with something provocative: "My agent is constantly reminding me to act successful, no matter what."

This goes back to what I like to say about confidence. Being self-assured is damn attractive. People gravitate toward confidence, which goes back to my theory that everyone hates to make decisions. When you're meeting or seeing a new person, and that person is confident, it immediately helps you form a favorable opinion of them. To trust them. To believe in them.

The only naturally confident people are sociopaths. The rest of us wallow in constant self-doubt.

But the world doesn't have to see that.

The only way people can ever know what you're feeling is by what you let them see. If you show them confidence —-even if the confidence is fake —-they'll see confidence.

And I believe that confidence should extend to all of your professional connections.

An agent/author relationship is a weird mix of business partnership, employee/subordinate, and husband/wife. We tend to reveal more of ourselves, and our insecurities, to our agents.

But looking at basic human nature, I'm not sure how wise this is. Your agent isn't your friend or soul mate. Showing frailty to the person who is supposed to champion your work may be a disservice to you and your career.

Nobody ever gives Charlie Brown any Halloween candy, or picks him for the team. I don't want my agent to pity me, or feel like she's doing me a favor. I want her to believe she's going to get super rich off of me, and act accordingly.

Now, we all have times in our careers where we need to be nurtured. And that's when you call up a trusted peer and unload. But you don't want anyone in this publishing business to perceive you as a charity case, ever.

My writer friend did get back on track, and now his career is booming. His secret? Keep writing. Keep promoting. And Zoloft.

Remember that perception is everything. How you feel about yourself is not how the world feels about you.
The best way to become successful is to act successful.

34 comments

To the Pros

Dear Professional Writers,

Do you remember being unpublished? The struggles? The hopes and dreams? The lottery-win feeling when you finally broke through?

Hold onto that feeling. Don't let it go. And beware:

A sense of entitlement.
Jealousy and envy of those who have more.
A feeling of superiority over those who have less.
Worry over the future, when you're lucky to be here in the present.
Getting bogged down in the details.
Focusing on the negative.

Also, *remember to give back.*

This is becoming harder the busier I become, but I'm still trying to help others get to where I'm at. To this end I teach writing at a local community college, I read manuscripts that people send me, I recommend writers to my agent, I hold writing contests, I buy other authors' books, I write reviews, I give blurbs, I always answer questions, I offer advice in person, in email, and on my blog and website, and most of all, I try to be patient and understanding with those who know less about this profession than I do, and gracious and thankful to those who know more than I do and share that knowledge.

The further you get into this business, the more idealism you lose. The same can probably be said of life.

One way to hold onto that idealism is to never forget where you came from.

Stay humble.

3 comments

Today's Motivational

Are you discouraged, depressed, angry, or overwhelmed by your writing career?

Check all that apply to you:

- You can't find an agent.
- Your agent can't sell your book.
- You can't finish your book.
- You can't sell your short story.
- Your book isn't selling well.
- Your publisher isn't doing anything to promote you.
- You got a bad review.
- You didn't get any reviews.
- You had a poorly attended signing/event/appearance.
- You're not making enough money.
- You're not making any money.
- Your family and friends aren't supportive.
- You keep getting rejections.
- Your career is stagnant.
- Your career is on the down swing.
- You don't have a career.
- You don't see any results from your efforts.
- You no longer make an effort.
- You're trying your best and nothing is working out.

If any of these apply to you, what's the solution? To keep banging your head against the wall, with no end in sight? To give up and move on? To completely change the way you're doing things? To celebrate small victories, and try to learn from failures?

No. No. No. And no.

Take a hint from poorly written characters and look at what you're doing. You're reacting.

Each of the above complaints is a reaction to something.

Reaction is passive. In fiction, passive is a no-no.

Be active.

The results of your actions are out of your hands —you have no control over them. But you have 100% control over what your do.

You got into this business for a reason. Reaching that goal involves action, not reaction.

Getting discouraged, depressed, angry, or overwhelmed isn't going to get you closer to your goal.

But writing, submitting, and promoting will get you closer. Even if you don't immediately see the results.

Don't psych yourself out of the game. A thousand mile journey begins with a single step.

As long as you keep putting one foot in front of the other, the finish line isn't simply possible.

It's inevitable.

23 comments

Things To Remember About The Publishing Business

1. Talent can have very little to do with success in this industry.

2. No one knows what will sell.

3. Just because something is publishable, does not mean it will be published.

4. Sometimes the unpublishable gets published.

5. The writing business has more than its share of pettiness. But it also has more than its share of well-wishers.

6. We tend to think of our successes as things that were earned, rather than the result of luck —-but it actually is luck.

7. Overestimating your own importance, or underestimating the importance of others, doesn't do anybody any good.

8. It's necessary to work hard, but that doesn't guarantee anything.

9. Few things compare to the joy of seeing your name in print.

For all the heartache, misery, and pain in this profession, number 9 makes is all worthwhile. Stick with it.

Hope is a Four Letter Word

I hear from a lot of unpublished writers —at least a dozen a week. I can break them down into two distinct groups.

Those that will get published, and those that won't get published.

The difference between the two doesn't come down to talent, or hard work, or luck.

The difference between the two is attitude.

The ones who will never get published, hope that they eventually will.

The ones who will get published, know that they eventually will.

If you want to be a member of any club, act like you already are a member. You can watch the party going on through the window and lament that you weren't invited, or you can figure out a way to get invited.

In short, to be a professional writer, you need to act like a professional writer, even though nobody is paying you yet.

Be confident. Be bold. You aren't buying lottery tickets, you're choosing which people you'll allow to buy your product.

And here's the secret —-no one is actually confident. Everyone is faking it.

But if you fake it long enough, you begin to believe it. The more you act like a writer, the more you become a writer.

Once you take hope out of the equation, possibilities become eventualities.

71 comments

Relax, Don't Do It

Everyone has different ways to relax and unwind. When and how often do you:

- Watch television?
- Go out to eat?
- See a movie?
- Read a book?
- Surf the Internet?
- Play sports?
- Drink alcohol?
- Do drugs?
- Attend a museum/concert/event?
- Listen to music?
- Sleep more than 8 hours?
- Post on blogs/message boards/listservs?
- Have sex (tandem or solo)?
- Read a newspaper/magazine?
- Go for a drive?
- Exercise?
- Go on vacation?

How many hours per day/week do you engage in the above activities?

And yet you can say with a straight face that you don't have time to write?

Your book won't get finished by itself. Thinking about writing, talking about writing, and writing about writing, are not substitutes for writing.

Writers write. Now move your ass.

35 comments

Work Ethics

Let's talk for a moment about successful people.

They have a commonality, whether they're Brittany Spears or Michael Jordan or Bill Gates or Nora Roberts. It isn't genius, or talent, or luck, though they may have some of that.

No, the thing that most success stories have in common is: Hard work, perserverence, and sacrifice.

Nobody gets handed a successful career. There are failures beforehand. Adversity. Set-backs. Mistakes. Learning curves. Hurdles to overcome. Refusal to give up.

Not too many bestselling authors debuted at #1 on the List. It was a gradual climb, over many years and many books. Lots of writing. Lots of promotion. Lots of persevervence and dedication.

I have life-long friends in Corporate America, and I find it interesting how many parallels there are between their careers and mine. We'll talk about long work weeks, and travel, and business politics and gossip, and competition. What happens in the publishing undustry happens in the engineering industry and the finance industry.

For my friends in the corporate world, I composed this list:

JA Konrath's 12 Steps to Success

1. Sleep is for babies and old women.

2. If you have anything left in the tank at the end of the day, you didn't work hard enough.

3. Fate is a future you didn't change.

4. There's a word for someone who never gives up... successful.

5. No one became rich or famous by being a good parent.

6. There's more to life than work, I've heard.

7. Vacation is a perfect opportunity to work hard in a different location.

8. If your boss doesn't push you as hard as you push yourself, your boss sucks.

9. If you don't take the credit, someone less deserving will.

10. Work smarter *and* harder.

11. You don't win races without facing some injuries.

12. Pain is temporary, chicks dig scars, and you need to stop reading blogs and get back to work.

— — — — — — — — — — — — — —

The list was meant to be tongue in cheek, but looking at it now, it isn't as silly as I'd intended it to be.

Obviously, this isn't a recipe for leading a balanced, fulfilling life. But it isn't a bad course to follow if you're consumed with desire for success at the cost of everything else. And it's probably the course that Brittany, Michael, Bill, and Nora followed.

Everyone is looking for that edge, that way to get to the next level. In publishing, the buzz is all about high concept, hooks, marketing, publicity, promotion, advertising, and coop.

Somehow, good old-fashioned hard work got left in the dust.

You need to write a good book. You need to have a good agent. You need to have your publisher behind you.

But most of all, you need to bust your ass. And if it isn't busted yet, you only have one person to blame for your lack of success.

48 comments

Twelve Things Writers Won't Ever Admit To

There are a lot of unspoken aspects of a writer's life —-things we don't admit to because it will make us look bad.

Since I gave up scruples for Lent (I also gave up Catholicism), I'll share the things that no one else will share. Here's the list in no particular order:

1. Answering fan mail is a drag. Sure, when we first got started we loved to hear from fans. But after the thousandth letter of someone proclaiming their love, we begin to cut and paste our responses (Thanks so much for writing!) Yes, I know this sounds sucky and ungrateful. But at least I still answer all of my fan mail —-lots of big shots have a website moderator do it for them.

2. We hate being edited. Writers will say that they love a good editor, but none of us actually believes the editor knows better. We listen, because we have to, but we think we got it right the first time and that we don't require any rewrites or tweaking. That's why, when we become bestsellers, we refuse to be edited.

3. We think our last book is better than the one that won that award. Even if we weren't on the final ballot. Even if we weren't nominated. Even if we write in an entirely different genre.

4. We don't read every book we blurb. Some writers don't even write the blurbs —they let the author who asked for the blurb write the blurb.

5. We think #1 NYT Bestsellers are crap, and that our own books aren't on the NYT List because we refused to sell out, because our publishing house didn't do enough, or because the readers are stupid. We also resent Oprah, but in public talk about how much she does for the publishing world.

6. We say snide things behind each other's backs. There's gossip, rumor mongering, and pettiness, and we badmouth people that we call our friends. Especially if they are award winners or #1 NYT bestsellers.

7. We envy each other. If an author gets a movie deal, a huge advance, a big tour, a magazine spread, we're incredibly jealous because we feel we deserved it, not them. Then we hide our feelings behind well wishes, and say snide things behind their backs.

8. We all have a martyr complex, believing that writing is an heroic, impossible profession, and that our tremendous intestinal fortitude is the reason we're professionals. That, and our natural talent. Oh yeah, we're also all egomaniacs.

9. We all have a sense of entitlement. We expect to be treated better than the average Joe, to be catered to, to be fawned over. The higher we climb, the more prima donna we become.

10. We're all constantly afraid that the world will realize we're frauds, and it will all be taken away from us. Our careers are precarious, fragile things, and we know this all too well, but we hide that fear behind bluster and bravado and say things like, "That book flopped because the author didn't try hard enough" when we all know that but for the grace of God go I.

11. We blame our publishers, our editors, and our agents, when our careers aren't going well, but take all of the credit when they are going well.
12. We secretly think that 99% of all newbie writers aren't good enough to make it. But we also think that 99% of all professional writers aren't good enough either.

— — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

All of these things don't apply to all writers, but some of these apply to all writers. Even if they vehemently deny it.

And I want to go on the record and say that ***ABSOLUTELY NONE OF THIS APPLIES TO ME.*** I'm just relating what I've seen and heard. I'm a kind-hearted, giving writer who loves everybody and everything about this profession.

As far as you know.

Anyone else want to admit to some unpleasantness inherent in this business? Feel free to post anonymously...

45 comments

True Grit Quiz

I rant a lot about how hard this business is to break into, and how it's even harder to succeed.

When people get the writing bug, it usually goes hand-in-hand with what I call "The Lottery Dream."

The Lottery Dream (TLD) is the fantasy that one day you'll be rich, famous, have movie deals, get on Oprah, and the world will finally realize what a genius you are.

All writers have TLD. Even bestsellers. But talent, hard work, and writing good books aren't enough for TLD to happen in reality. Luck still plays a part.

Some newbie writers convince themselves they don't have TLD. That they'd be perfectly content with no advance and a small print run, as long as they're published somewhere.

They are wrong. They'd be content, for a while, but human nature would demand they want more. That's how life works. Being satisfied is the same thing as being complacent, which is why you don't see many Buddhists running Fortune 500 companies.

The measure of a writer's grit is what finally makes them quit. At what point do you cry 'uncle' in your quest for TLD?

This quiz will tell you if you're in this for the long haul, or if your time would be better spent on some other more attainable goal.

True Grit Writing Quiz

1. **How long will you continue to try even if you don't succeed?**
   a) Two years
   b) Five years
   c) Ten years
   d) I'll never give up
2. **How many rejections will you endure before you quit**?
   a) 1-50
   b) 1-100
   c) 101-500
   d) I'll never quit
3. **How many unpublished books will you write before you stop writing?**
   a) 1
   b) 2-5
   c) 6-10
   d) I'll never stop writing

4. **If you become published, how many hours will you spend promoting your work?**
   a) 5 hours a week
   b) 10 hours a week
   c) 20 hours a week
   d) As many as it takes
5. **What are you willing to sacrifice in order to succeed?**
   a) Hobbies
   b) Personal & vacation time
   c) Time with friends & family
   d) All of the above
6. **Why do you want to be a writer?**
   a) Artistic expression
   b) Fame and notoriety
   c) Wealth
   d) This career chose you
7. **What is most important for writers?**
   a) Talent
   b) Craft
   c) Luck
   d) Persistence
8. **How much will you compromise your integrity to sell a book?**
   a) I won't ever compromise my integrity
   b) I'll only make editing changes if I agree with them
   c) I'll make most changes, but not all
   d) Pay me and I'll change anything
9. **If people hate you and your book, you'll:**
   a) Be devastated and never write again
   b) Be upset, and try to please them by any means possible
   c) Shrug it off and keep doing what you want
   d) Try to understand their points and learn from your mistakes
10. **If you work your whole life but never get published, will you consider it:**
   a) A waste of your life
   b) A disappointment, but at least you tried
   c) A bitter defeat
   d) A success, because you did it your way

Scoring

If you answered "d" for most or all of the questions, it doesn't mean a damn thing. You might never become published or successful, no matter what you answered. But your chances are better than folks who answered a, b, and c.

If you answered "d" for five or more questions, here are four more questions for you:

1. **What is the difference between being stubborn and being persistent?**
2. **What is the difference between being committed and being delusional?**
3. **Is quitting an act of failure, or an act of self-awareness?**
4. **In writing, is validation internal or external?**

Later on I'll post my answers to these questions. Feel free to post your answers too.

44 comments

Uncertainty

Writing isn't a career for the weak-hearted.

Besides the regular perks of self-employment, such as spending countless hours on your tax return, being without health insurance, and lack of regular paychecks, there is also what I consider to be the the most daunting aspect of all:

The fact that, at any moment, you won't have a career anymore.

Many things conspire to sabotage our livelihoods.

Signing with a bad or mediocre agent is like putting your all your money on a three-legged horse to place. Even good agents can be wrong sometimes, which is why they're unable to sell much of what they acquire.

Your editor can quit. Your publisher can change agendas. Other, similar books can tank, squashing plans for yours. Like all companies, publishing houses often have good employees and bad employees, and who winds up in charge of editing, promoting, and marketing your book is a crapshoot —-especially since only 1 out of 5 books makes a profit anyway.

Bookstores may not buy your book sufficient quantities, or reorder stock when it sells. They can shelve it wrong, ignore coop placement, refuse to stock your backlist, and do a hundred other things that could hurt your potential sales.

The readers may not buy it. They may not like it. They may not know it even exists.

I've often said that you have to sell a book several times in order to actually earn a royalty. First, to an agent, then to an editor, then to the publisher, then to distributors, then to bookstores, then to the customer. Anywhere along the food chain, tragedy can occur.

No, this isn't a career for people who want or need security.

But the worst thing about being a professional writer has to be this:

Being between contracts.

It's true that your second book is harder to sell than your first. Numbers follow you. If your sales aren't strong, your career is pretty much over.

When you have a contract, and a guarantee of a book coming out and a check coming in, you breathe a little easier. That's real, concrete, something you can count on.

But then your contract ends. And, for those who haven't been in this position before, I have to lay down some bitter truth here: it can be weeks, or months, before you get another contract. Sometimes even years.

You'd think that a publisher who has been growing a writer for several books will want to immediately reassure the writer that there will be more books to come. This isn't the case. Deciding to offer a new contract depends on many things. Numbers, money, in-house enthusiasm, trends, backlist sales, critical

response, the influx of new people and farewell to old people at the publisher, new imprints, closed lines, and so on.

Plus, since your publisher often has a first look option for your next book, there's no rush. You give them a manuscript or outline, and they can take up to three months to make an offer.

This waiting time is hell.

If you're a guy, it's like having to propose to your spouse all over again every few years. And ladies, it isn't romantic. It's nerve-wracking. The possibility of being told no can terrify the stoutest heart.

So, when you're between contracts, how should you deal with it? After so much booze, so much fingernail chewing, so many phone calls and emails to peers who assure you that of course you'll get an offer, what can you do to keep your spirits up?

Here are some answers:

Write. The best way to cope with the anxiety of being without any visable means of support is to get another iron in the fire. The more projects you have completed, the better your chances at selling one of them. While you're waiting to get a contract for one book, write another book. Or a screenplay. Or some short stories.

My latest book was on submission for almost six months before it sold. In the meantime I wrote another book and a screenplay —which are now on submission. I'm currently working on three other projects. Writer's write. They don't wait around with their fingers crossed.

Believe. I'm not big on faith. I prefer cold, hard, provable facts, and think hoping and wishing for things have as much use as guilt and worry —in other words, no use at all.

But having confidence in my work, and knowing that if this current project doesn't sell, the next one will, is how I'm able to sleep at night when I'm between contracts. I believe I'll succeed. Without resorting to mantras, daily affirmations, or self-pep talks, you can also believe you'll succeed by remembering the following:

- You've got talent.
- You're constantly honing your craft.
- You're smart.
- You're dedicated.
- You work hard.
- You keep writing.
- You won't ever give up.

Actually, that does sound like a self-pep talk. But so what? You need to believe in all of these things if you truly want to be successful.

Success isn't about accepting "no." It's about searching until you find a "yes."

Think. This one is the hardest. While writers tend to be overly introspective, they aren't normally self-critical. After all, in order to have confidence and believe in ourselves, we have to trust our writing, our goals, our business plans.

But we should only trust those things after they've been proven.

I posit —and I'm 99% right —that your worst enemy in this business isn't your agent, your editor, or the publishing industry as a whole.

It's you.

If you're not being offered contracts, if your career is flagging, if you've been rejected a gazillion times and don't understand why, it's because you aren't looking hard enough at what you're doing wrong. Because, believe me, you're doing something wrong.

Yes, publishing comes down to luck. But odds play a part in luck. And if you understand odds and stack them in your favor when you can, you eventually have to win something.

If you're doing more losing than winning, you need to figure out why. It's not the casino's fault —their odds are set. It's your fault, because you're a shitty gambler.

Here are some things to consider:

- Check the writing. It might not be as sharp as you think it is. Get other people's opinions and demand criticism, not praise. Figure out what you're doing wrong. Examine the lock before you make the key, study the markets, understand the genre you're writing in, and figure out your place in the machine.
- Evaluate your professional relationships. If your agent isn't working for you, dump her. If your publishing house isn't behind you, leave them. Don't settle for scraps, because then scraps are all you'll get.
- Examine your goals. Are these attainable goals (I'll send out 50 queries, finish the book, and rewrite the outline) or goals that are beyond your control (I'll get an agent, become a bestseller)? Unrealistic goals not only cause disappointment, but your structure for reaching them is invariably flawed.
- Look at yourself. No one thinks they're difficult, negative, stubborn, or demanding. Yet, at times, all of us are all of these things. Projecting them professionally is the kiss of death. Observe and understand the effect you have on others. If someone insults you, even constructively, assume that a hundred other people think the same thing but don't have the guts to tell you.

Like everything in life, the more you have control over (your craft, your drive, your attitude, your relationships) the less uncertainty you'll encounter.

There will still be uncertainty, because success still requires luck. But empowering yourself with knowledge, awareness, confidence, and good old-fashioned hard work is a lot more productive than holding your breath and hoping.

Now uncross your damn fingers and get proactive.

21 comments

Vacation Time

My wife cornered me yesterday, demanding that I tell her which week I have available this summer so we could take a family vacation.

We haven't taken a family vacation in four years. Not coincidentally, that was when I landed my first book deal.

My family deserves a vacation. Hell, I deserve a vacation too. But Hyperion hasn't planned the tour yet for DIRTY MARTINI (the release date looks to be the end of June) so I don't know where I'm going to be or what I'm going to be doing this summer.

My wife said that we need to take a week where we can rent a cabin on a lake, go fishing and swimming, and just hang out and relax.

I explained that I'm working my butt off so some day we can buy a cabin on a lake, and go fishing, swimming, and just hang out and relax every day for the rest of our lives. Remember the grasshopper and the ant? Work now, relax later.

My wife reminded me that my son will only be nine once, and we should enjoy him at this age.

I said that I have two distinct memories from being nine years old, neither of them involving my parents.

My wife called me an idiot. I couldn't argue with that.

But we do need a vacation, so I am going to find some time. I still haven't fully recovered from my 500 bookstore tour last summer. Since getting home I've written a screenplay, a novel, eight short stories and articles, attended seventeen events, and visited another 112 bookstores. I need to finish another book this month (which will be my 15th novel) but then I'll have a little bit of free time.

So I'm going to do it. I'm going to go on vacation. I don't want to be planning for a future with my family and find out —-when the future arrives —-that my family isn't there to share it with me because they got tired of waiting and left.

Am I the only insane workaholic who has this problem?

40 comments

At What Point Success?

I've been thinking about Maslow's Heirarchy of Needs, and the way human beings treat success, both their own and the success of others.

Are there criteria? Are those criteria universal?

When does an author become 'successful?'

- Selling a book?
- Earning a living?
- Selling movie rights?
- Hitting the bestseller list?
- Having 1000 books in print? 10,000? 100,000? 1,000,000? 10,000,000?
- Getting on television?
- Winning awards?
- Getting ten emails a week from fans? 100? 1000?
- Having 100 website hits a day? 100,000?
- Being ranked in the Top 50 on Amazon?
- Getting paid for speaking?
- Receiving fan mail?
- Being known within your genre?
- Being known by the general public?
- Earning out your advance?
- Getting a six figure deal? A seven figure deal?
- Having your backlist still in print?
- Being sold in Walmart?
- Getting on Oprah?
- Teaching and helping others?
- Trying your best?
- Being happy?

I know bestselling authors and self-published authors and many in between. I know writers with a lot of talent who haven't gotten published, and those who have gotten published without a lot of talent. I know that hard work plays a part, but so does luck, and luck favors the prepared.

But most of all, I know that if I ever want to be successful, my definition of success has to change.

The day I no longer need any kind of validation is the day I'll truly be successful.

Does anyone want to validate me on that?

14 comments

Write A Good Story

It drives me a little crazy whenever I hear authors state that their job is to write the best book possible, and that's all they have to do.

The "that's all they have to do" part is what drives me crazy. In this competitive marketplace, the more the author can do to promote the book, the more books they will sell. Period. You can argue with that, but you'd be an idiot to try.

But the "write the best book possible" is something I agree with 100%.

Of course, the concept of "good" is a subjective one. One person might like something, the other may hate it. The author has little control over that. But the author does have the power to understand the genre they're writing in, and the ability to deliver on reader expectations according to some standardized storytelling mechanics.

If you write recognizable, conventional prose in a popular genre, your chances of getting published increase dramatically. I'd go so far as to say that the reason there are so many writers getting rejected isn't because they suck. It's because their work isn't focused enough to appeal to key demographics that publishers actively sell to.

Know your market, and you have a much better shot at selling your book.

This just happened yesterday to a close friend of mine. I'll name him if he allows it, but we'll call him HP.

HP labored in obscurity for years, writing a lot of unpublished stuff.

Then he wrote a damn good thriller, and landed an agent and now a great publisher. He called his shots, and hit what he called.

Congrats HP, we always knew you had it in you.

But HP's success story isn't one based on fairy tales and lottery wins. Was luck involved? Hell yeah. But craft, study, and deliberation paid a huge part.

HP immersed himself in the thriller genre. He attended the conventions. He met and befriended authors. He read extensively. He wrote hundreds of thousands of words of mediocre prose to hone his craft. He learned about the industry, and how it worked.

Then he wrote a thriller using everything he learned. He wrote. And rewrote. And edited. And rewrote. And rewrote. And edited. And rewrote. Until he had something that his peers generally agreed was publishable ("good" being subjective, but I certainly thought it was good.)

In short, he demystified the publishing process, and found his place within it.

But it doesn't end there for HP. Getting a publisher is just the beginning. His "good story" will hopefully be embraced by the unwashed masses, and they'll like it so much that they talk about it and buy copies for each other.

Agents, editors, and publishers believe they know what will sell. But they still fail all the time. Ultimately, the public determines what will sell, by buying it.

Writing a good story plays a part in that.

Sure, there's coop money, and ad campaigns, and discounting, and lots of ways for a publisher to push a book. But the book still has to be worthy of the push.

Make sure your book is worthy.

All too often, writers dwell on telling the story they want to tell.

Maybe writers should take a step back and ask themselves:

What is this story trying to do?
Who is this story for?
Will this story satisfy the intended reader?

Because a "good" book is ultimately the one that fulfills reader requirements. That reader could be an agent, an editor, or a single mother in Scranton, PA. They all have criteria.

Learn what those criteria are.

Promotion is about getting people to try you.

But once they try you, telling a good story is what makes that person a fan.

15 comments

This is Your Career Wake Up Call

(ring, ring)

Good morning, this is your career. It's time for you to wake up.

You're in trouble.

You've written a good book, or maybe even a few, but you aren't selling as well as expected.

Your publisher is behind you, but they're spending most of their marketing dollars on books that are selling better than yours. That may seem unfair, but it is the way of the world.

You've done signings, but you've never done well at them.

You've got a website and a blog, but even though you seem to be getting some visitors, it isn't translating into sales.

You've gone to conventions, literary festivals, and conferences, but you've never sold enough books to justify the travel cost.

You're doing all the things you're supposed to be doing, but no one seems to care.

Don't you think it's time to quit?

You're never going to be a huge success. A few good reviews and a few fan letters don't mean a thing. This business is about numbers. And yours aren't nearly good enough. You're small potatoes, and you need to recognize that.

You got into this because you love to write. But now you have to deal with deadlines, bad reviews, and overwhelming apathy toward your work. People may think you're doing well, but they don't know the truth. You spend more time promoting than writing, and it never seems to pay off.

You aren't making enough money to justify all of your time and effort.

Don't feel bad. You gave it your best shot. No one could have asked for more. This is a hard business where only a few thrive. Did you really think you would be one of them?

Look at how many other writers you know. How many of them make a living at it? How many are bestsellers? Five? Maybe ten? Out of the five hundred you've met? Doesn't that tell you something?

Why torture yourself for years to come with dreams that will never be fulfilled? Why force yourself to visit one more bookstore, one more conference, one more event? Aren't you frustrated? Don't you realize that every other author has this same problem? You're all desperate and struggling, no matter how much bravado you show the public.

You'll never make a difference, and you'll never be happy.

Quit now, and save your sanity.
You'll never... hey, wait, don't hang up!

You have to listen to me! I'm the voice of reason! I'm cold, hard logic, telling you that you suck! You need to realize...

(click)

We apologize for the preceding announcement. That wake up call was not for you.

You may go back to sleep now.

Dream big.

16 comments

Your Daily Motivational

Write.

Even if you have other things to do.

Even if it sucks.

Even though it's hard.

Even though there are no guarantees.

Even if no one else cares.

Revise.

Even though it's difficult to be objective.

Even if you think you got it right the first time.

Even though you hate it.

Even if you're sure it's a waste of time.

Submit.

Even if it's to a small, non-paying publication.

Even if you feel you're not ready.

Even if you hate rejection.

Even if you know you'll never be accepted.

Repeat.

You're a writer. Act like one.

28 comments

Blog Post Number 300: Your Goals

It's hard to believe I've done 300 posts since beginning this blog.

That's a lot of info about publishing.

Getting published, staying published, and becoming successful, has a lot to do with luck. But one of my core philosophies is that the harder you work, the luckier you get.

Last blog, I asked you folks what your goals for 2008 were, and how you planned to reach those goals.

I got a few responses. Some are brief. Some are detailed. Some are cynical. Some are inspiring.

I encourage you to read each and every one, because the sum is greater than the parts, even though a lot of the parts are dead-on.

You might recognize some of these names. Others, you may not recognize yet.

Yet.

So let's see what our peers, both newbie and pro, have to say, in the order I received their answers:

SAM REAVES

1. Your goals for 2008.

Get my next novel on the New York Times bestseller list.

2. How you will reach these goals.

Entitle my next novel "As Seen on Oprah".

But seriously, folks... In 2008 I'd like to do a better job of promoting my new novel (Mean Town Blues, coming from Pegasus in late 2008) than I did my last one (Homicide 69, from Carroll and Graf in 2007). I hope to accomplish this through careful bribery and shameless hucksterism.

RAYMOND BENSON

1. Your goals for 2008.

Get my two latest novels published by a reputable publisher and get a movie deal for at least one of the two screenplays I've written.

2. How you will reach these goals.

Pray. Don't break any mirrors. Throw salt over my shoulder. Don't walk under ladders. Don't antagonize my agent. Throw a coin into the wishing well —no, make that several coins. Be nice to everyone I meet. Bend over backwards. Give away the shirt off my back. Find a falling star and wish upon it. Think positively. Don't let rejections get me down. Don't give up. Pray.

JAMES ROLLINS

1. Your goals for 2008.

To write two books: one thriller, one young adult novel

2. How you will reach these goals.

Committing myself to writing 5 pages a day.

CHARLAINE HARRIS

My goal for 2008 is to sell more books than I did in 2007, and I hope to do that by writing better books.

STEVE BERRY

1. To make it to 2009.

2. Work my ass off, writing everyday, and hoping, somehow, to get it right.

ROBERT W. WALKER

1. Your goals for 2008.

Given the current state of publishing, I am hoping for the minimum, so my goals are scaled down...lowered expectations. We learn from recent history and are informed by the state of the art. 2007 and 06 have seen tougher and more difficult times for
authors gaining contracts. It almost seems that if you don't have a movie or game tie-in, or a gimmick, or what's the new term for it, a platform, say a novel that has a whale of information about fly fishing, crocheting, farm animals in crisis, a haunted microwave that also explains how microwaves are in fact supernatural, or a dog or cat at the center of the mystery, you are not going to sell your novel. The more serious the work, the harder to sell has always been true, but never as true as today.

It seems editors are prowling for fluff and publising much of it with such titles as The Cat Who Came in From the Executioner's Toilet. In this market, my goal is to find an editor interested in a complex, layered novel (sell at least one in 08) with fully realized characters. Primary goal is to make enough money to support my writer's life and perhaps buy my wife a gift once in a while.

2. How you will reach these goals.

I will pressure my current publisher to get on track with my next work; I will pressure my agent to ferret out editors who are killing to work with me (not always easy to do). And I will remain on the look out for such a person. I have already sent out multiple inquiries for a new novel, and am hopeful that once the holidays have passed, that singular individual who understands and responds to my voice and purpose will be found.

I will also go to as many writers conferences as I can afford. I am also making inquiries with folks on the other coast, Hollywood, again hoping to find a connect there that might pan out. Much of marketing is a shot in the dark, but one keeps
firing. Never say die.

MICHAEL DYMMOCH

1. My goals for 2008.

Finish at least two of the six books I currently have in progress.

2. How I will reach these goals.

No idea.

MARK TERRY

My writing goals for 2008:

1. Complete the manuscripts for 3 specific novels. One I'm working hard on, one I'm tinkering with, and one I wrote a proposal for, but think will sell better if I complete it.

2. ANGELS FALLING is scheduled for publication May 2008, so my goals regarding that revolve around specific goals I have for promotion: visit a minimum of 25 Michigan bookstores and sign stock. There are other things in development, but I haven't laid them all out yet.

3. Sign at least one book contract (preferably more) for the completed novels.

4. Hit a specific dollar amount for my writing in total. I won't say it here, but it's a little higher than my 2006 number and better than the 2007 number, which wasn't as good as 2006, but was still pretty good. Hitting goal #3 would help considerably in this. I've already signed a nonfiction business report contract for a good chunk of it, the advance expected in January.

BOB MORRIS

Number one, far ahead of all the rest...

Broaden My Platform: Given the fickle nature of publishing and the increasingly shallow pool of people who buy books, the only way I'll continue to prosper as a writer is to create product for a variety of divergent markets.

How the heck I intend to do all of the above
I currently have two non-fiction book proposals with my agent (one in sports/recreation the other in health/medicine.) We'll whip those into shape and, with luck, have contracts for both in early 2008 and completed manuscripts by the end of the year. In addition to fulfilling my contract with St. Martin's for a fifth book in the Zack Chasteen Caribbean Mystery series, I'll flesh out ideas for a Young Adult novel and a historical novel set in 1870s Florida. And while 2007 was a very good year for my freelance magazine business, I'll continue to place articles in new markets and find more venal, yet lucrative, copywriting projects with advertising agencies in order to pay the everyday bills.

And somewhere along the line I'll: update my Web site and blog more frequently; continue to strengthen ties with booksellers; make even more speeches, book festival panels and bookstore signings than the 120 or so that I did in 2007; and attract gobs of new readers.

In short, in 2008 I'll: Write faster, sleep less, travel to new places and have even more fun than I'm already having.

JUDY LARSEN

My goals for 2008: First up, i will have sent off my second, fully revised MS to my agent by the first of the year, so hopefully I'll be celebrating its sale early in 2008. That means I'll be starting my third novel by the end of the month. And finishing it before the end of 2008.

Here's how I will accomplish this goal: Between now and Christmas 2007, I'm working 2-3 hours every day to complete revisions for book #2. For Book #3, I've learned it takes me about two months to write a novel (I'm clearly no Joe!). So, my goal is 4000-5000 words a week. Have a finished draft by the end of the summer, then spend two months revising. Voila. Book #3.

Thanks for making me put this in writing, Joe.

DALE PEASE

I set a goal about two years ago to finish my first novel by the time I turned 40. Well, I turned 40 this past March, and didn't quite make it. I did finish the first draft in April or May. But I decided something simple like not meeting my goal was not going to discourage me. So I set a new goal of having the novel finished by my next birthday, March of 2008. That means polished, edited, tweaked, and ready to find an agent. I'm still a ways off, and March is coming up fast, but I still think I can do it.

JANE DYSTEL (Agent)

1. Goals for 2008: I'd like to try to take on only those projects that I love and feel passionately about (as opposed to doing favors or going against my instincts when something doesn't feel right). I'd also like to find new areas of interest – my client list is pretty eclectic, but I'd love to find a great children's book, or a military thriller, or other types of projects in areas I haven't ventured into too often.

2. How will you reach these goals: I'm going to try to be more realistic about my time and how valuable it is and really force myself to say "no" if things aren't right for me. And, I'd like to increase my reading time so that I can look at more things that may be coming over the transom in those areas I'd like to expand into.

JONATHAN DANIEL

Get and develop a website.
Earn at least $500 from my writing.
Finish EVERY story I have started/ideas written for.
Begin at least 1 new novel.
Get an agent for the novel I have completed.

MICHAEL A. BLACK

1. Your goals for 2008.

My main goal for 2008 is to continue writing and turning out the best stuff that I can. A long time ago, before I'd sold any of my novels, I was just sitting down to start a new manuscript. When the mail came, I discovered that I'd gotten one back that I'd previously sent out. Depressed and demoralized, I questioned myself. Did I really want to continue in this writing game? Steeling myself with resolve, I vowed to begin this new novel, putting everything I had into it, making it the best that I could make it, even if no one else ever read it but me.

That manuscript was A Killing Frost, and it turned out to be the first of mine to get accepted for publishing. So my goal is to keep that fire in my belly . . . to keep turning out the best prose I can . . . to write in an entertaining and interesting manner.

I also have to continue to promote the new projects that are coming up. A Killing Frost was just released last month in mass market paperback, and I have the first novel in a new police procedural series due out from Dorchester in the spring. It's called Random Victim. I also have a collaborative novel, Dead Ringer, that I wrote with my writing partner, Julie Hyzy that's due out in 2008 as well.

2. How you will reach these goals.

I hope to reach these goals via two words: HARD WORK.

JASON O

1. Lose 30 pounds.

How? Get on the treadmill as part of my daily routine, not just once in a while.

2. Improve my marriage.

How? Learn to communicate with my wife more effectively.

3. Write one short story to see if all these ideas in my head can be translated into something coherent and worth sharing.

How? I'll jot down the random plot points I've come up with between now and Jan. 1st, then use my lunch hour at work everyday to write until the short story is complete.

MJ ROSE

1. Your goals for 2008.

Write better...

2. How you will reach these goals.

Read more!

ANN VOSS PETERSON

1. Your goals for 2008.

Well, I have a March deadline, so finishing the WIP before then is my first priority. After that, I need to make some more sales so I can continue to make up stuff for a living. That means writing proposals and/or complete manuscripts. I'd like to write a total of four to five proposals next year (and -hopefully- sell them) and finish a complete that I'm working on in addition to the deadline book.

All the goals I make are for things I can control. As a result, I don't set publishing goals, just writing goals. I've found if I do the writing, the publishing part tends to take care of itself (with the help of my agents).

2. How you will reach these goals.

I write full time, so reaching these goals is a matter of showing up at my computer, pushing my insecurities aside, and putting words on the screen. It's as simple and as complicated as that.

JENNIFER SHEW

1. Your Goals for 2008.

I really want to get a novel finished and in submission shape so I can get an agent.

2. How you will reach these goals.

I will write as much as I possibly can, as well as I can.

BARRY EISLER

My main goal for 2008 is to finish my eighth book before the end of the year. That'll be the official end of this "just in time" delivery system I've been laboring under, where I turn in a new manuscript five months before the pub date. Much better to have one in the queue and that's what I'm shooting for.

My marketing goals are less distinct. Sometimes I hear other authors say things like "My goal is to crack the NYT printed list," but I don't really think in those terms. Not that I don't want to crack the printed list, and more; it's just that I've broken down into bite-sized chunks the list of things I need to do to achieve my lofty goals, and now I focus day to day on making sure all those little things happen. Over time, they add up. So I guess you could say my marketing goals for 2008 are to continue to do the things I've been doing. Which means, at a high level, appearances, online presence, increasing penetration of the romance demographic (sorry, I had to say it), etc. etc.

More abstract still: to continue to try to gain greater self-awareness and objectivity about the world and my place in it. To continue to try to be the change I want to see in the world (learned that from Ghandi). This one is much harder than the other two, and infinitely more worthy.

How will I reach these goals? Well, I gotta stop sniffing glue, that's #1...

Seriously, the key to achieving any goal is to reverse engineer the goal into steps you can follow every day. The thought of writing a 100,000 word novel is daunting. But if write only 500 words — less than two pages — a day, the book will be written in just over six months. Break it down into little pieces, focus on those pieces, stop thinking about the big bad goal. Shit, who can't write 500 words in a day? I'll probably write nearly that many just in this email.

It sounds odd, but focusing too much on the goal once you've figured out what it is is counterproductive. Cops involved in a shooting typically report a telling sequence: surprised, they get their weapon out and shoot instinctively, thinking things like "Die!" and "Go down!" Of course, hitting the other guy is one of the key goals in a gunfight (the other being not to get hit yourself). What's interesting is that, at this stage

of the gunfight, the cop can't seem to hit the target. Then, after a second, the training kicks in. The cop stops thinking "Go down!" and instead reverts to the sequence he learned to concentrate on in training: aggressive stance. Gorilla grip. Front sight on the target. Roll the trigger.

And bam, like magic, the bad guy falls down.

Break it down into manageable steps, then systematically follow those steps. Your life could depend on it...

Another way I've heard it expressed is: plan the work, then work the plan.

I could go into a lot more detail, but I have to get in my daily writing...

ZEBA CLARK

1) Finish the first part of a trilogy I've just started writing. Get the 500 words per day done.

2) Work hard at getting my YA fantasy novel published.

JAY BONANASINGA

My goals for 2008:
To somehow achieve the balance of being a loving husband and father while also negotiating the hellish shark-infested waters of the book and movie business, which I love, God help me, but not as much as my wife and kids. Does that make any kind of grammatical or spiritual sense?

How I will reach these goals is by being as nice as possible to my family, while simultaneously pushing the envelope of my writing comfort zone, especially stretching into new genres such as true crime, fantasy, and dark comedy, and also taking regular dosages of Xanax and Belgian chocolate.

DAVID MORRELL

I keep remembering something Mason Williams (the composer of "Classical Gas") said about how he worked hard on his music and it improved but then he worked on himself and his music improved a lot more. I've been trying to get some balance in what I do. For years, I spent so much time writing that I didn't pursue activities that I'd always wanted to try. Flying, for example. Last March, I made the decision to take flying lessons. Twice a week, I now go to the local airport in Santa Fe, where I fly with an instructor and (this is a very conscious metaphor) "get above it all." My skills are now sufficient that I soloed and am able to take the plane up by myself. By June, I hope to have my pilot's license.

While this might seem to have nothing to do with writing, it actually is pertinent. I think it's possible to get so involved in the publishing world that our imaginations get stuck in the conventional rut that publishing appears to encourage these days. Meanwhile, our lives go by, along with the chance to experience things

that spark our creativity. I know that I'll use my piloting experience in a book some day. Meanwhile, it amazes me how refreshed I am after a lesson and how more energetic my mind is as I return to the desk.

Every project should be an adventure, just as our lives should be adventures. If we can make the two come together, there's no stopping us.

RJ MANGAHAS

1) Complete my novel (sit my ass in a chair and write the thing)

2) Sell a few more stories (make sure I send them out)

3) Get my website up and running (kind of the same as #1)

DAVID WALKER

1. Goals for 2008:

Write more.
Write better.

2. How to do it:

Pay more attention.
Think less.
Go deeper.

JAMES O. BORN

My main goal is annex the western third of Canada and rename it Jimvada. The capital will become Bornville. Gambling, outrageous fireworks and sex with farm animals will be legalized. From this stable and fun place to live I will then create an army that will attack countries which have no military or Moslems because it seems like those are the two things that seem to cause problems with invasions. Perhaps Polynesia because they're protected by France which is the same as no military.

I will reach this goal as I do all other goals. I will train, be ruthlessly determined and then rely on a tremendous amount of luck.

As for publishing

My goal is to have a good launch on Burn Zone in February and build on the strides I made last year. Unless you are lucky, building an audience is a slow, careful process. I also work on improving as a writer every year and learn from the corrections of the previous novel.

The first goal requires some help from the publisher and fate. A few more reviews, a little news coverage and everything starts to roll. The second goal is something I'm serious about and work on not year by year but everyday by listening to seasoned writers I respect, seeing what editors are saying and looking at things from their perspective then by reading good books.

But I'm new to all this so I may be wrong.

TESS GERRITSEN

1. My goals:
— Finish writing Book #7 in the Jane Rizzoli series.
— Lose 5 pounds.

2. How I'll reach those goals:
— Plant my butt in my chair and write
— No. More. Martinis.

LUCAS BARKER

My Goal for 2008:

To get my "voice" back. And finish a story.

How?

One. Page. A. Day.

JEFF STRAND

1. I only have one writing-related goal in 2008: To finally get that ever-elusive mass market deal!

2. Part of my plan to reach this goal involves...waiting patiently. After all, my agent has sent out three-chapters-and-a-synopsis proposals for two new novels to various editors, along with two novels that have already been published in very tiny print runs as pricey collector's editions. But that's not good enough if I want to be as famous as the mighty J.A. Konrath. So to supplement the stuff that's already floating around, my primary 2008 goal is to —in addition to finishing the already-contracted small press work —give my agent a complete, unencumbered, highly marketable novel to sell.

GREG HUFFSTUTTER

#1 Goal For 2008

Get my current novel – which is currently on submission – accepted by a legit publishing house.

How I'm Going To Reach That Goal

In this case, it's up to will of Fate, Karma, unseen market forces, and St. Martins' Press. I've written and re-written, found a legitimate agent who's doing her job, so all I can do now is control my own attitude. That means not being a pest, not living in a "lottery dream" fantasyland, and not wasting my free time when I could be working on the sequel.

#2 Goal For 2008

Write a minimum of 180 pages of the next book… which may not seem like a lot given your productivity level, but with a toddler at home, another baby on the way, full-time advertising job, and bi-weekly column in Buzz, Balls & Hype, 180 pages will be a stretch (of my wife's patience to boot).

How I'm Going To Reach That Goal

Write during lunches, write in hospital waiting rooms, write during nap times, give up watching "Project Runway," and be happy, damn happy with 5-6 hours of sleep a night.

#3 Goal For 2008
World Peace.

How I'm Going To Reach That Goal

Recycle my plastic bags. Not vote for Guilliani.

BRIAN PINKERTON

Your goals for 2008.

1. Sell book I just completed
2. Write new book
3. Grow readership
4. Repeat steps 1-3 for next 30 years

How you will reach these goals.

Beat back distractions with a heavy club.

ROB SIDERS

My Goal for 2008:

1. Finish WIP

How I'm Going To Reach That Goal:

2. Get it written

JOSEPHINE DAMIAN

1/1 - start new novel
12/31 - finish (hopefully not too shitty) a first draft of new novel

1/7 - start researching/writing masters thesis
11/1 - finish first draft of thesis/submit to advisor
12/20 - Graduate from grad school!

BARBARA D'AMATO

I wish I had something witty or pithy, but this is sincere.

My goal is to learn not to struggle so much with the stuff I think I must do and not beat up on myself for the things I haven't done. You can think of many more jobs for the upcoming day than you can complete. I suppose this is the old stop-and-smell-the-roses advice.

How would I achieve it? Not the slightest idea, except to go for gratitude. I hope to take more time to be grateful for what I have, including my friends in the mystery world.

JOHN HOLTON

I had a stroke back in February, which affected my right hand to the point that I type with one hand and haven't put a pen to paper (I'm right handed). My primary goal is not to let that stop me. To accomplish it, I'm going to teach myself to write left-handed and train ViaVoice to understand me so I can really "talk on paper". Of course I'll rehabilitate my right hand as well as possible, but it's
good to have Plan B.

My next goal is to write at least three pages a day. To do that, I'm going to stop worrying about writing crap and just go ahead and do it. If I get something to send out, great, if not, it's practice.

NICK AMBROSE

My goals: To continue ploughing on with my latest novel, and to polish, re-polish, re-re-polish (etc.) my previous novel, then submit to agencies

How I'll achieve my goals: I'm going to continue to book computers in the college library each day to polish my previous novel and work on the current one. I'm going to continue to redraft my previous novel

until I am completely happy with it, and then when I am, I'm going to send it out to agencies and keep pushing it and staying motivated so that I find that one that says 'yes'.

LIBBY FISCHER HELLMANN

1. Your goals for 2008.

Sell through EASY INNOCENCE, my 2008 book (coming in March) at a higher level than any of my other novels… get a movie option… foreign rights… and a nice big contract for my thriller, Broken Angel…

2. How you will reach these goals.

Much of it is out of my hands…(ie agents, editors, booksellers, and third parties will determine my ultimate success) so I'm trying to concentrate on what I can do.. which is to write the best book I possibly can.

BARBARA MARTIN

My 2008 goal is to get the first manuscript published and get an agent, too. My plan is to make submissions to five agents and publishers each week; and while I
am waiting for responses, I will be working on the second and third manuscripts.

BARRY LYGA

1. My goals for 2008 are actually very simple: Write my fourth book and also work on something outside of my normal "zone" of YA literary fiction. I'd like to write a screenplay or develop a video game or put together the big, epic fantasy series I've been plotting in my head for a couple of years now.

2. The old-fashioned way: By putting my butt in my chair and writing. :)

JAIME LEVINE (editor)

If I were to name a professional goal, I'd say it's to buy more nonfiction. So much of what I do is fiction, which I love, but I also like the challenges of new projects and I like learning new trades, so I'd like to develop myself as a nonfiction editor.

I have pursued several projects this year and I have one book in the hopper that's slated to come out in Summer 08, The Monster of Florence by Douglas Preston. I want to use it as a spring board to make more acquisitions.

To be truly successful at this, I am reading more nonfiction to get a sense of what I like. Then I am studing the market around my areas of interest in order to figure out what what books work, so I can have a sense

of what books are worth acquiring. And I am studying how to publish those books (package and market). I did this process for graphic novels (my first graphic novel, Shooting War, just published in Nov 07), and now I'm turning my attention to a new area of publishing —expanding my stable of nonfiction projects.

NEIL DIXON

Main writing goal: Complete my first novel TableRappers: Persistent Spirit. (tablerappers.com)

How: initially release as an audio novel in weekly episodes, build an online community and following, then re-write and release printed version.

MARY FITZSIMONS

My goals for 2008

1. Sign with an agent.
2. Finish the sequel to the novel I'm currently submitting.
3. Write a full-length standalone to start submitting, should I fail to find an agent for the first.

How I will reach these goals

1. By stepping up my submissions and including American and Irish agents as well as British.
2. By improving my writing and increasing my output.
3. By listening to and learning from those who've tread the path before.
4. By staying focused and keeping these goals as my top priority.

PATRICK BALESTER

1) To promote my first novel, In the Dismal Swamp, which is coming out in June 2008.

2) To sell my second novel.

How I will accomplish these goals:

1) By writing to libraries and independent bookstores asking them to buy my book & possibly allow me to do a book signing. Secondly, by running a Half-Marathon. Unusual? Perhaps. But my old home town in Virginia is hosting the second annual Dismal Swamp Stomp 13.1 mile race in April, and since the setting for my book is the Dismal Swamp, I thought it would be a natural tie-in. The race is in April, and I'm going to wear a T-shirt promoting the book, and try to arrange a local press interview beforehand.

2) By submitting queries to as many mystery publishers as I can, I hope to find a home for my second book, unless, of course, my first publisher wants it.

WAYNE THOMAS BATSON

1. Finish my edits for Isle of Fire before Christmas.

2. Spend as much time with my family as I can.

3. To work on my next writing project, but not under contract. I know this sounds odd, but I really want to explore this new fantasy realm I'm creating. I don't want to have to churn it out in 4 months.

SOTALIA

1. Your Goals for 2008.

Now that I've completed my first large project, my first goal is to edit it into a readable story. Not that my writing is bad, but the whole thing is pretty piecemeal and needs to be edited. I did realize about two-thirds of the way through my story that it would be better cut down into a short story than expanded into a novel.

My second goal is to write and edit three other short stories. While I am well aware that publishers aren't terribly excited over short stories, I believe that these four ideas are all better shorter and will attempt to sell them as a collection.

A full-length novel is also being planned as a collaborative effort. One of my goals is to at least get this outlined, if not partially written by the end of the year.

2. How you will reach these goals.

My biggest writing problems are procrastination and distraction. I have learned through the NaNo challenge that it is possible for me to stay focused on the task at hand and actually force myself to write even when I didn't feel like it. I also know that it's possible for me to churn out large chunks of text in a short period of time and actually have the finished product be readable.

Now that I know that I am capable of writing something worthwhile, I can use what I've learned and apply it to my writing projects.

1) Take the same schedule I had this past month and use it to plan and write.

2) For me, editing while writing is a form of procrastination. I spend so much time editing one paragraph that I get bored with the story and stop writing. (I have a short attention span) So, I will write first just to get the story down, then go back and do the major editing later.

3) Ignore all the people who think it's "cute" that I'm writing stories, and that it's a phase I'll grow out of (sure, a phase that's lasted 25 years... hee.). They were wrong when they said I couldn't complete NaNo. They're wrong when they say that I should just stick with my day job, even though none of them have read anything I've written.

4) Keep writing. I normally write almost every day anyway, so that's not much of a stretch.

5) Keep reading your blog so I get all the good tips. :D

RACHEL GREEN

I intend to write two more novels in 2008, edit the two I wrote this year, and get another one published.

On the non-writing front I'll take more martial arts classes and try not to break any bones.

LEE CHILD

I think a "goal" has to be something I can hit or miss based on my own personal efforts. So whereas I have a wish list for 2008 - a president from the same planet as me, a Yankees sweep of the Dodgers in the World Series, my new apartment to be finished - about the only thing actually within my control is to write a book - for 2009 - that's as good as or better than the previous twelve.

The way I'll try to do that is give myself time ... I don't use an outline and depend on letting the story evolve organically, and my worst enemy is rushing. So I'll slow down and think carefully.

CONDA

My writing goals for 2008.

Simple: I'm determined to write the novel that's been lurking in the quirked corners of my mind for 3 years. And there's about 10 short stories (my first love: writing short stories) stuffed in there as well. Out, out, damned stories!

GREG SWANSON

My goals for 2008:

Drop enough weight to get down to 200 lbs, and get back into writing something. Anything.

I plan to reach these goals by watching my diet, excercising more, reading your "Newbie's Guide To Publishing", and badgering you constantly for advice and approval. Good luck with that.

JESSICA BURKHART

My goals:

* Finish writing my third and fourth books for my MG series

* Get a brand new project to my agent
* Try writing a screenplay

* Publish 50 new magazine articles and at least 10 in magazines I've never queried before

* Decide on which MFA program to attend (choices, choices!)

TASHA ALEXANDER
Goal for 2008:

I want to challenge myself as writer and make the fourth book in my series really spectacular. Take everything up ten notches. That sort of thing.

What I'm going to do to achieve this:

1. Take a research trip to Istanbul (where the book is set)

2. Figure out ways to make my characters do the things they think they would never do

3. Meet daily word-count goals (I shoot for 2K a day)

4. Get into a good routine of writing during the day and reading great books at night

CYN BAGELY

My goals for this year:

1. 2 first-draft novels
2. 1 edited novel
3. Start trying to sell edited novel.

How I am going to accomplish these goals:

1. Write minimum of 1 hour per day or maximum 4 hours per day (not counting Sunday —I need at least one relax day, and vacation when my stepfamily shows for a vacation).
2. Do a minimum of 3-4 edits on novel (done in part of my writing time).
3. Start researching agents and/or publishing houses.
4. Also, if I cannot get the first novel published I am going to post it on my site. And, then go to the next one. I have promised myself that I will not get all worked up about rejection. I have other problems that are more important like Wegener's Granulomatosis. (Flannery had lupus —blood disease and I have WG blood vessel disease.)

JA KONRATH

My Goals For 2008

1. To find new ways to promote myself and my work. I'll do this by watching, asking, thinking, trying, failing, and learning.

2. To get a contract for Jack Daniels #7.
3. To keep up with my email, my website, my blog, my MySpace.

4. To never settle for less than my best, in every aspect of my personal and professional life.

I can't control the publishing industry. But I can control certain aspects of my place within that industry, through hard work and perserverence.

There's a word for a writer who never gives up. Published.

There's also a word for a published writer who never gives up.

Me.

12 comments

Things I've Learned Being A Fulltime Writer

I've learned these the hard way; by making these mistakes myself. Keep them in mind when you land that deal.

- Don't volunteer. It's very easy to get used. I'm all for helping out within the writing and publishing community, but I've gotten burned a few times. Know what is in it for you, and be clear about what you're getting in return.

- Don't compare yourself to other authors. Someone is always going to have more money, larger print runs, more fans, and better deals. Competition is healthy, but it should be with yourself, not with others.

- Don't listen to reviews. You will anyway, but don't take it personally. Not everyone will like your books. Not everyone will like you. It isn't important what people are saying, as long as they're saying something.

- Don't go to awards ceremonies. Losing isn't a big deal. What hurts is having fifty people come up to you and say, "Sorry you lost."

- Be approachable. Both in person, and in cyberspace. If someone reaches out to you, reach back.

- Learn to turn it off. I'm still struggling with this. Being a writer defines me as a person, and I can't seem to ever get away from it. I've had one vacation in three years, and during that vacation I did booksignings. Know when to relax. And when you learn how, teach me how.

- Cherish family and friends. After you become a writer, there won't be many people who knew you 'before.' The ones who did are special. Never let them forget how special they are.

- Don't worry. No matter how much you do, how hard you try, luck still plays a huge part in success.

Your Daily Inspiration Booster Shot

A Newbie's Guide To Publishing is now three years old.

That's a long time to be blogging. And reading some of my older posts (over 300 of them) I've found that many of the things I've said are still relevant.

So here's a list of some Joe Konrath quotes. If any of them resonate with you, please tell the folks at Bartlett's...

— — — — — — — — — —-

There's a word for a writer who never gives up... published

Before you make the key, study the lock.

People would rather defend their beliefs than question them.

It's about what you have to offer, not what you have to sell.

You have a better chance of getting struck by lightning than landing a publishing deal. But understanding the market and working to improve your craft can have the same effect as climbing a tree in a thunderstorm, carrying a long iron rod.

No one is entitled to anything.

What are the last ten books you bought, and what made you buy them? Use those techniques to sell your books to other people. Do what works on you.

Hard work trumps talent. Persistence trumps inspiration. Humility trumps ego.

Praise is like candy. We love it, but it isn't good for us. You can only improve by being told what's wrong.

Your book is your child. You can't recognize its shortcomings, any more than a proud parent thinks their child is dumb and ugly.

The experts don't know everything, and they might not know what's right for you.

Fate is a future you didn't try hard enough to change.

Anyone looking for you can find you. Get them to find you by looking for something else.

Life gives you wonderful opportunites to conquer fears, learn skills, and master techniques. "I can't" shouldn't be synonymous with "I don't want to."

People seek out two things: information and entertainment. Offer them freely, and they'll find you.

The Internet isn't temporary. What you post today can lead people to you decades from now.
Writing is a profession. Act professional.

Always follow the advice of an editor, even if you don't agree, because then *your* book becomes *our* book. A editor will fight harder to champion *our* book.

No one said it would be fair, fun, or easy. But it is worthwhile.

Publishing is a tough industry. Celebrate success whenever you can, because there will be many failures.

We're all in the same boat. Start rowing.

If you can quit, quit. If you can't quit, stop complaining —-this is what you chose.

Don't compare yourself to other writers. Nothing good can come of it.

There are a lot of things that happen beyond your control. Your goals should be within your control.

Just because something is publishable doesn't mean it will get published.

Write when you can. Finish what your start. Edit what you finish. Submit what you've edited. Repeat.

The most successful people on the planet have one thing in common: nothing can stop them. Don't expect to reach your goals without sacrificing things that are important to you. You can't be both happy and ambitious.

Being your own best advocate is about understanding how people react to you.

Fake confidence, and real confidence follows.

Maybe you can't win. But you sure can try.

It's your name on your book cover. It's your responsibility to sell your book. If it flops, your publisher will still be in business, but you won't.

Always have two hands reaching out. One, for your next goal. The other, to help people get to where you're at.

If you can't be smart or funny, be brief.

There's a word for a published writer who never gives up... me.

21 comments

Validate My Parking

Writers crave validation.

It's built into our psyches. We believe our words are good enough to put down on paper, and then we have the narcissism to think that others will not only enjoy our words, but pay for the privilege to read them.

Because of that, we tend to get attached to what we write. These words are our babies, and criticism is hard to bear. We take it personally.

This is silly. Everyone has an opinion, and all opinions are valid. Yes, if your writing failed a reader, it's your fault. But your job isn't to enthrall every reader. Your job is simply to enthrall more than you fail.

The fact is, you'll fail some readers. Lots of them.

You'll get bad reviews. You'll get angry emails. You'll get snotty comments. Some will be aimed at your writing. Some will be aimed at you personally.

This is a good thing.

Not because these comments are correct —-though if enough people say the same thing, you should really start to listen. But because getting feedback, good or bad, means you're reaching people.

The bigger you get, the more negative feedback you can expect.

So how do you deal with people who don't like you?

If you want to be a grown-up, you should ignore them. I've never seen anything good come out of engaging a critic. Once you begin to defend yourself —or even worse, attack —you've pretty much lost some face.

What Peter says about Paul shows more about Peter than about Paul.

As for how you should feel, well, you should act like a grown up there as well. Sticks and stones. Unless someone is burning a cross outside on your front lawn, you really can't take negative people seriously.

You shouldn't take positive people seriously, either. But you can say "thanks" to those who offer kind words. If you're really grounded, you can thank the naysayers too.

But JA, isn't validation the reason we become writers in the first place? Didn't you read your opening sentence?

Yes. But get your ego boost from your royalty check, not from reviewers, critics, fans, blogs, awards, peers, and message boards.

Then who are the people you should listen to?

That's easy. Turn on your cell phone. Look at your contact list. Those are the important people in your life. Take praise and criticism from them. Everyone else is window dressing.

Some people won't like you. Get used to it. If you can't, don't be a writer.

You're a pompous, egotistical, self-important know-it-all.

Thanks for your comment, and thanks for reading. :)

30 comments

The Myth Of The Good Book

No, we're not debunking the bible here. We're talking about the pervasive idea that if you write a good book, it will sell. The writer doesn't have to have an Internet presence, or make any public appearances, or do any marketing, self-promotion, or publicity. All the writer needs to do it write a good book and it will magically find an audience.

It makes no difference the years of experience or the amount of success a writer has had, many still believe this.

It's baloney, of course.

As I've said many times on many forums, "good" is subjective. There's no universally accepted standard for "good" because everyone has an opinion. Editors and agents, who believe they know what "good" is, still represent and publish books that fail more often than not. We've all read crappy books that are big hits, and we've all read wonderful books that are now out of print.

"Good" is a really poor indicator of sales potential.

But the myth still persists: Write a good book, and it will sell.

Instead of poking holes in this concept (I'm privy to the *"You can write the best book in the world but people won't buy it if they don't know it exists"* rebuttal), maybe we should look at why so many writers feel this way.

1. Naiveté. If a writer is only responsible for writing a good book, they don't need to know anything about this mysterious business known as publishing. This offers the artist a nice, insulated cushion from real life, where they feels they only needs to worry about writing the best book they can and everything else will be taken care of for them.

2. Stubbornness. It's a publisher's job to sell books. Period. The writer writes, and nothing else. If the writer does their job, the publisher will promote the heck out of it, and the book will find a wide audience.

3. Fear. It's a scary business, and self-promotion is expensive, time-consuming, and difficult. It's much easier for an author to focus on writing than learn the skills needed to become a salesman. Writers get rejected often enough by agents and editors. They shouldn't have to risk getting rejected by readers as well.

4. Envy. We all know a few indefatigable writers who are constantly promoting their brands. We don't like to think that perhaps we should be promoting our books with equal vigor, instead clinging to the belief that the book should sell itself based on its own merits. It's much easier to attack someone else than blame ourselves.

5. Bad results. Perhaps the writer has tried to self-promote, had a bad experience, and now refuses to do anything else. This is a shame, because we all swallowed some water learning how to swim. Practice makes perfect.

Now let me make it clear that writers do need to write the best book they possibly can. That should go without saying. But in a world with so many forms of entertainment competing for our time and money, in a world where 200,000 new books are published every year but only 1 out of 5 makes a profit, in a world where selling a first book is difficult, but selling a second book is impossible if the first one didn't do well...

Obviously, it is in the writer's best interest to make an effort in selling their books.

Here are some things to remember about self-promotion.

1. People are looking for information and entertainment. They aren't looking for ads or commercials.

2. Sales isn't about selling a book to someone who doesn't want it. It's about finding people who are looking for your type of book and offering it to them.

3. Books sell one at a time, and every effort you make has intangible benefits.

4. Think about the last ten books you bought and why you bought them. These are the strategies you should use when selling your books.

5. Set attainable goals. Becoming a bestseller isn't a good goal, because it is largely out of your hands. Going to three writing conferences and introducing yourself to 100 new people is within your power.

6. This is a marathon, not a sprint. Self-promotion is about planting seeds, and these often take a long time to grow. The longer and harder you work at this, the better you'll do.

7. Believe in your book. You have to believe that you did, indeed, write a good book, and that others will enjoy it. If the words on the page don't speak to you, they won't speak to others, and nothing you do to self-promote is going to change that...

32 comments

Brain-Check

Part of being human is trying to figure out what in our pasts have led to our present.

That means we often attribute significance to past occurrences and what we believe led up to those occurrences. After all, hindsight is 20/20.

Looking at successful people, we can make observations about their histories, compile similar data, and draw conclusions about what makes a successful person.

But unlike science, which uses controlled experiments that are repeatable, it's impossible to have a control group for a person's life. Good things that happen may indeed be a result of hard work and effort, or it may be the stars aligning. It's usually a little of both.

While an astute student of human behavior can find commonalities among the success stories, these are often vague rather than defined, and if repeated under similar conditions do not always result in success for other people.

When you add exceptions —people who do something other than what the majority do —to the mix, it becomes downright impossible to predict success.

Which brings us to writing.

We're supposed to write a good book, but the term "good" is subjective. Then we're supposed to promote it, even though only a small percentage of books actually become bestsellers, and bestselling authors may not do a lot of promotion.

Because there are no guarantees, no controlled way to study and repeat success, and not even a universal definition of "good", the majority of us spin our wheels in relative obscurity, while a select few make it big and then tell the rest of us exactly how they did it, even though they're often attributing significance after the fact, which simply isn't good science.

So what's a writer to do? Work hard self-promoting even though the odds are against it paying off? Struggle to write a good book, whatever that means? Study the market? Ignore the market? Listen to bestselling authors? Listen to their publisher?

Readers of this blog know my feelings about luck. It pervades the publishing industry, and life in general. I've blogged before about maximizing the potential for luck by working hard, but without specific instruction that's like a coach at half time telling his team that in order to win they have to play better.

So here's some specific instruction.

1. Study the situation. That means learning everything you can about writing and publishing. Read about it, talk to people in the industry, and seek answers.

2. Set attainable goals. Once you have a rudimentary understanding of how publishing works, you can figure out how to leverage your standing within it. Keep goals to things within your control.

3. Learn from both failure and success. Try things for yourself, try them again, and revise and evolve.While you can't control the experiment, you can test and hone tactics.

4. Don't compare yourself to other writers. No good can ever come of this. Ever. Writers aren't in competition with each other for contracts or fans, and one person's success doesn't hinge on another failing. Envy is poison.

5. Value yourself. If you don't have enough confidence to believe you're worth more, no one is going to give you more.

6. Bust your ass. If you aren't driven to succeed, you probably won't. How bad do you want this? If the answer is: really bad, then you have to prioritize accordingly.

7. Forgive. You'll make mistakes. People will screw you. Circumstances may conspire to keep you down. Regret, guilt, worry, and self-pity are all just as poisonous as envy. Let the past stay in the past and move on. You're better than that.

8. Dream. That's why you became a writer in the first place. It's the one thing you have complete control over, and the one thing that will keep you going when everything else is going to hell. The day you stop dreaming is the day you stop trying.

Did I miss anything?

22 comments

Artistic Anguish

Many writers say you have to write every day.

That's BS.

"Write when you can" is a good rule of thumb for newbie writers trying to break in, or those who have busy lives and need to micro-manage their time.

My personal motto is: "Write before it's due."

I don't believe in muses, any more than I believe in writer's block. I heard a fellow writer once say, "No one ever gets farmer's block." I agree. If your job is to be creative, performing on cue is a must.

And please don't overplay your own importance.

A famous writer once said, "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you."

She didn't ask for comments, but I'd offer, "Being trapped in a burning car seems a bit worse."

Writers tend to do two things really well: whine and inflate their own importance.

Who was that famous guy who spent an entire day anguishing over a semi-colon placement? Am I the only one who thinks this is ridiculous? And we're supposed to look up to him as some sort of ideal for artistic integrity?

Tell you what —spend two minutes fretting over the punctuation mark, then spend the other eight hours of the day volunteering at a soup kitchen. Then you'll have my admiration.

Writing IS NOT HARD. Laying bricks is hard. Curing disease is hard. Fighting in a war is hard.

Writing is sitting on your butt and stringing words together.

And what's with these writers who think all they have to do is write? They really, truly believe it is a publisher's job to sell the books, and all they have to do is turn in a decent manuscript.

Look, I'm the first person to admit that self-promotion is expensive, exhausting, time-consuming, and difficult. I'd much rather sit in my house and write books instead of doing all the travelling, lecturing, signing, and Internet busywork that currently occupies most of my professional life.

But name any other job that is 100% fun. Tell me who loves every second of their 9 to 5 day.

Imagine an executive saying, "It's not my job to take meetings" or a chef who insists "I won't cook vegetables."

Here's a shout out to all of my writing peers: We're entertainers. We're the folks who tap dance on the street corner for money. We should consider ourselves lucky to have this job, and be willing to do whatever we can to keep this job.

Save the drama for that journal your kids will throw away when you die, and realize how good you really have it.

And the next time you think that writing is hard, or that you don't want to self-promote, or that your precious words are the most important objects in the world, gimme a holler. I'll stop by with some matches and a can of lighter fluid and I'll help you readjust your priorities.

115 comments

Needy

We writers are a needy bunch.

Perhaps because the only way we can measure success is by the approval of others.

The act of writing is often fulfilling, but by its very nature self-indulgent. And after spending time in our own heads, we need others to validate our efforts because we can't objectively judge them ourselves.

Success in this business requires acceptance from agents, editors, and readers. From the first two, we seek this acceptance by submitting, rewriting, and editing manuscripts, and all too often we get rejection letters for our efforts.

As for readers, we naturally want to reach as many as possible, and get as many of those to like us as possible. But because reading, like writing, takes place in a person's head, there often isn't any indication of how much acceptance we're actually receiving.

So we seek it out. We Google our own names, and check our Amazon rank and reviews, and track our website hits, and count our blog comments, and obsess over royalty statements, and accumulate MySpace friends, and hope that all of this will somehow make us less neurotic and more confident.

But it doesn't make us more confident. It makes us ashamed. We wonder why more people don't like us, at the same time despising why we consistently seek out their acceptance, and hating ourselves for doing so in the first place.

This blog is not going to show you how to be less needy. If you're a writer, that's impossible.

But it is going to tell you something all writers need to know.

It's okay to be needy.

So you can stop feeling bad that you crave approval. You can stop thinking you obsess too much over your career. You can stop worrying that you're some lone freak, feeling small and weak while everyone around you overflows with confidence.

Everyone picks their nose. Everyone masturbates. And all writers are needy.

Neediness is wired into the artistic temperament. Not only does it make us strive to succeed and improve, but once you truly stop caring about what other people think you become both insufferable and a lazy writer.

So go ahead. Embrace being needy. Seek out the approval of others, and when you find it, enjoy it.

And when instead of approval you find scorn, envy, bitterness, and hateful attacks, remember that they're only opinions —-opinions that come from whiny, unhappy, nose-picking morons who masturbate waaaaaay too much.

Now I encourage you to leave a comment here, and then forgive yourself when you check back 17 times today to see if anyone responded to you.

29 comments

Control Freak

I've harped on this in other posts, but I don't believe I've devoted a whole post to it.

In a nutshell: Only set goals you can control.

As writers, a lot of things are beyond our control. Getting an agent, selling a book or story, landing on a bestseller list, winning awards —these all rely on varying degrees of luck, right place/right time, and the support and efforts of many other people.

Because of this, writers tend to be let down a lot. When you get a rejection, lose an award, or don't sell as many books as you'd like, it's natural to get depressed.

But you shouldn't get angry, or sad, or offended. Because it makes no sense to get upset over things you don't have control over.

There's a direct correlation between dreams and disappointments. Hope is a four letter word.

Writing is all about putting yourself out there. Chefs cook food to be consumed. We string together words to be read. Having readers is half the equation.

But we really don't have much control over who reads us.

We can search for an agent, search for a publisher, search for readers. But we can't make any of them like our writing.

Because of this, we get rejections, and bad reviews, and unimpressive sales, and the resultant disappointment. This makes it hard to keep on keeping on, when the acceptance we desire is 100% out of our control.

So the secret to happiness in the writing biz is about controlling what you can.

The first thing you have control over is your work. What you write about, and how much time and effort you spend writing it, is all up to you. This is a goal you can reach.

While you can't make an agent or publisher accept your work, you can seek out agents and publishers with queries, at conferences, and through recommendations of other writers. These are all within your power, and attainable goals.

You don't have control over distribution or sales, but you can devote time to branding and seeking out fans. This won't land you on the bestseller list, but every book you help to sell is a goal you had control over.

On this first day of 2009, take a good look at your goals. Which are attainable on your own? And which require luck?

We all need luck. But your goals should be based on your hard work and efforts, not on gambling.

Concentrate on what you can do, and do it to the best of your ability. If luck smiles on you, great. If not, keep at it —unless your goal is to feel sorry for yourself. That's a self-fulfilling prophecy that writers tend to excel at.

22 comments

The Writer As Spendthrift

There are a lot of people who want to separate a writer from her money.

Let's face it; getting published is a goal for many people, but it's such a difficult goal to attain it borders on being a dream.

Dreams don't normally come true. But people will pay big bucks to keep the dream alive.

This morning I'm teaching a one day class at the College of Dupage called "How to Get Published." (Oddly enough, I'm filling in for another teacher who, to my knowledge, has published very little.)

It's an adult eduction class, only a few hours long, and costs less than fifty bucks.

For the students, it's a good deal. I know a lot about the biz, and am good at sharing what I know.

But I am a notable exception. Many writing teachers have never been published by a major house. Many don't have agents.

Yet every college has writing teachers who are willing to take your money and teach you theory they've never practiced.

The bookshelves are crammed full of books about how to write killer query letters and bestsellers. But I only know a handful out of hundreds that were actually written by bestselling authors.

Pick up a writing magazine, or surf the Internet, and you'll find many things to spend money on besides classes and how-to books.

Freelance editors. Book doctors. Fee charging agents. Vanity presses. Self-publishing. Contests. Seminars. Conferences. Conventions.

Joe's advice: Writers are supposed to make money, not spend money.

Unfortunately, because writing is such a hard business to break into, many feel that if they spend some money on the aforementioned things, they'll better their odds.

In practically all cases, no. And you are not the exception to this rule. Trust me.

Today, my students are going to get their money's worth in the first 30 seconds of class, when I tell them:

DON'T SPEND MONEY ON ANYTHING TO GET PUBLISHED.

I do add that there are a few small exceptions. Taking a writing class or two isn't a waste of money if the teacher is an industry pro. You can learn a lot from industry pros. But many of these pros also have tips on their website that are 100% free.

All writers should own copies of Stephen King's On Writing, David Morrell's Lessons From A Lifetime or Writing, and a few notable others.

Conferences and conventions are a great place to meet agents, editors, and peers, and networking is just as important in this biz as in any other.

But even these exceptions come with warnings.

If you're taking a bunch of writing classes, chances are you're wasting your time and money. You could be writing instead, and joining a writing group will make you a better writer without costing a penny. There is probably a writers group already at your local library, bookstore, or college. Ask. If there isn't one, start one.

Owning too many how-to books means you're spending too much time reading about writing instead of actually writing.

I know many folks with procrastinitis. They cloak themselves in the trappings of all things literary, spends scads of money pursuing their dream, fantasizing about it constantly. Yet they rarely sit their ass in the chair and write.

If you're going to more than two conventions a year and you aren't published yet you're chasing a dream, not a goal.

As for the other things I mentioned:

Don't enter contests you have to pay for. If your story is good enough to win, it's good enough to sell.

Don't ever pay anyone to help you edit, fix, or rewrite your prose. Learn to do it yourself. I don't know a single author published by a major house who had paid help.

Don't pay an agent anything, ever. Agents don't need to have any sort of license or accreditation, and bad ones abound. For a list of good ones, visit www.aar-online.org.

Don't pay to have your work published. Why not? Visit your local bookstore. Look around. None of the authors on those shelves paid to have their books published. If you pay to be published, you won't be on those shelves.

Since I'm fond of analogies, here's a good one:

When you're learning how to walk, you don't take classes. You don't read how-to books. You don't pay experts to help you, or do it for you.

You just keep falling until you learn on your own.

It's the same thing with writing.

I just saved you fifty bucks. Or perhaps a heck of a lot more.

You can show your appreciation by buying a bunch of my books. Because there is one thing that all writers should spend money on, and that's supporting each other. If you're writing fiction, and you haven't read at least a hundred novels, you haven't learned enough about craft to succeed.

And if you're curious as to what other bon mots I'll toss out in class today, here's a list of Joe Konrath quotes on writing, publishing, and marketing, free of charge:

There's a word for a writer who never gives up... published.

Before you make the key, study the lock.

People would rather fight to the death to defend their beliefs than sit down quietly and question them.

It's about what you have to offer, not what you have to sell.

You have a better chance of getting struck by lightning than landing a publishing deal. But if you really want to get hit by lightning, you can improve your odds.

No one is entitled to anything.

What are the last ten books you bought, and what made you buy them? Use those techniques to sell your books to other people. Do what works on you.

Hard work trumps talent. Persistence trumps inspiration. Humility trumps ego.

Praise is like candy. We love it, but it isn't good for us. You can only improve by being told what's wrong.

Your book is your child. You can't recognize its shortcomings, any more than a proud parent can consider their child dumb and ugly.

The experts don't know everything, and they might not know what's right for you.

Fate is a future you didn't try hard enough to change.

Anyone looking for you can find you. Get them to find you when they're looking for something else.

Life gives you wonderful opportunities to conquer fears, learn skills, and master techniques. "I can't" shouldn't be synonymous with "I don't want to."

People seek out two things: information and entertainment. Offer them freely, and they'll find you.

The Internet isn't temporary. What you post today can lead people to you decades from now.

Writing is a profession. Act professional.

Always follow the advice of an editor, even if you don't agree, because then your book becomes our book. A editor will fight harder to champion our book.

No one said it would be fair, fun, or easy. But it is worthwhile.

We're all in the same boat. Start rowing.

If you can quit, quit. If you can't quit, stop complaining —this is what you chose.

There are a lot of things that happen beyond your control. Your goals should be within your control.

Just because something is publishable doesn't mean it will get published.

Write when you can. Finish what your start. Edit what you finish. Submit what you've edited. Repeat.

The most successful people on the planet have one thing in common: nothing can stop them. Don't expect to reach your goals without sacrificing things that are important to you. You can't be both happy and ambitious.

Being your own best advocate is about understanding how people react to you.

Fake confidence, and real confidence follows.

Maybe you can't win. But you sure as hell can try.

It's your name on your book cover. It's your responsibility to sell your book. If it flops, your publisher will still be in business, but you won't.

Always have two hands reaching out. One, for your next goal. The other, to help people get to where you're at.

If you can't be smart or funny, be brief.

If you're not in love with the sound of your own voice, how can you expect anyone else to ever be?

Knowing you're not original is the first step in becoming unique.

And if one of those doesn't get me into Bartlett's Familiar Quotations sometime before I die, when I do die I'm going to haunt the Bartlett family...

65 comments

I'm Better Than You

I'm a much better writer than you are.

Sure, I know that taste is subjective. But if we could wave a magic wand and strip away personal taste and bias, leaving only the raw, core elements of what makes writing good, everyone would know the truth: That I'm the greatest writer to ever live.

It doesn't matter if other writers make more money. They got lucky, and good for them. But my writing is better than theirs.

It doesn't matter if other writers sell more books. That's all dependent on the publisher, and how big a marketing budget a book has. It doesn't make their books better than mine.

It doesn't matter if other writers win more awards, or get better reviews. That's all subjective. On a level playing field, if we stripped away the bias and nepotism, I'm better than all of them.

I shouldn't ever say this in public, of course. People will think I'm an ass. An egomaniac. A deluded know-it-all. They'll question my grasp of reality, and try their best to cut me down, to prove me wrong.

In fact, they might try to cut me down even if I never speak of how great I am. That's okay. They're envious, or ignorant, or unhappy with their own lives. A writer as magnificent as I am can't be bothered with petty people.

But the undeniable fact remains. I am the greatest writer who ever lived. I am a legend. I am a god.

I have to believe this. I have to believe this with all of my heart and soul. How else could I keep sitting down, day after day at my computer, forcing out prose that might never ever sell?

I know I'm the best. How else could I keep my sanity in a crumbling marketplace and a volatile industry?

I'm superhuman. How else could I justify the time, the money, the blood and sweat and toil and tears I've shed pursuing this profession? How else could I believe that someday I will land that megadeal, and hit that bestseller list, and win those awards, and get those great reviews?

Do you really think I'd get anything done if I believed I sucked?

But that is irrelevant. I don't suck. I'm incredible.

Every time I struggle through a tough scene, wrack my brain for a plot complication, send yet another baby out into the world to be ridiculed and rejected, the only thing that keeps me going is my unwavering faith in myself.

I. Am. The. Best.

And if you don't think you're the best, quit now. Once you begin to doubt yourself, you get eaten alive.

I encourage all of you to gape in awe at the greatest writer in the universe. I command that you gaze into this writer's eyes and see the creative genius simmering within. The writer that towers above all others. The writer that will conquer the world.

Go. Do it now. Look at this magnificent writer.

Hint: You'll need a mirror.

38 comments

Confident or Delusional?

Kissinger was wrong. Power isn't the ultimate aphrodisiac.

Confidence is.

Confident people attract others. They get things done, spending more time doing and less time worrying. Confidence fosters charisma, inspires allegiance, and demands attention.

All writers need to be confident. We must believe our work is worthy, that our efforts aren't in vain.

But what are the differences between confidence, and its ugly step-sister, delusion?

Confident writers know they'll be published, if they keep at it.
Delusion writers think they'll be rich and famous.

Confident writers work to get the words right.
Delusional writers think they got the words right the first time.

Confident writers expect to be periodically rejected.
Delusional writers are shocked every time someone fails to recognize their brilliance.

Confident writers take suggestion.
Delusional writers believe their words are written in stone.

Confident writers work even when it's hard.
Delusional writers believe they need to be inspired first.

Confident writers know this is a job.
Delusional writers think this is a vacation.

Confident writers know there's a never-ending learning curve.
Delusional writers believe they've learned all they need to know.

Confident writers know when to move on, and learn from their failures and successes.
Delusional writers keep doing the same things, over and over, hoping for different outcomes.

Confident writers know luck plays a big part.
Delusional writers think there's a conspiracy against them.

Confident writers get published.
Delusion writers don't get published very often, and if they do it's not for very long.

Confident writers work within the system, even though the system is flawed.
Delusional writers work outside of the system, even though they long to work within the system.

Confident writers understand their limitations.
Delusional writers don't believe in limitations.

Confident writers understand sacrifice.
Delusional writers demand everything on their terms.

Confident writers believe in persistence.
Delusional writers believe in talent.

Confident writers believe they owe the world.
Delusional writers believe the world owes them.

Are you confident or delusional?

Chances are high the delusional people will believe they're confident, since self-awareness is in short supply in the writing community.

Here are some questions to ask yourself.

Have you been published by an impartial third party?

Confident writers eventually get traditionally published. Period.

Do you seek out and apply editing advice?

Confident writers know their words can always be made stronger.

At what point do you abandon a project and begin a new one?

Confident writers move on, but first they try to figure out what didn't work, and why.

Would you rather be paid or be praised?

Confident writers know the best form of praise is a royalty check.

Do you help other writers?

Confident writers know it's about what you put in, not what you get out.

Do you understand your failures?

Confident writers don't have failures. They have learning experiences that make them stronger.

Will you be successful?

Confident writers know success is beyond their control. But they keep writing anyway, and will continue to even if success never happens.

It's not about the destination. It's about the journey.

You must believe in yourself.

But first you have to prove yourself worthy of that belief.

93 comments

Luck You

I haven't blogged in a few weeks, because I've been busy. Besides working on a deadline, I've had a ridiculous number of good things happen in my career lately.

I'll make official announcements when I can, but I will say that I'm going to be around, in various genres, for the next few years, and I'm going to make a nice amount of money.

I've told a few of my writing peers some of the details, and their remarks have been genuinely supportive. They're happy for me. This means I pick my friends well, because I haven't encountered a single smidgen of envy.

But I am noticing something they say which I don't agree with.

Everyone I've told has told me I *deserve* this. Every single person.

They back up their statements by saying, "You've worked so hard" and "You've done so much" and "It's about time your writing got some recognition."

They're sweet to say so, but they're wrong.

Long time readers of this blog know that I truly believe, deep in my heart, that no one *deserves* anything.

But sometimes, we get lucky.

If people truly deserved things in life, it would imply there is some sort of fairness in the world, and some sort of guaranteed way to get rewarded for our talents and efforts.

I'm pretty sure that's not the case. Many talented writers languish in obscurity and poverty. Some newbie writers get huge deals without "paying their dues."

It's always been about luck.

Luck dictates where you're born, and who your parents are. Luck dictates the traits you're born with. Luck plays a part in your education, your career, your love life, the friends you have, and pretty much every facet of life.

As I write this, Haiti was just hit by a massive earthquake, and tens of thousands are dead. None of them deserved that. It was just horribly bad luck.

By the same token, no one deserves to land big publishing deals.

We all *want* big publishing deals. And a select few get lucky.

I believe if you work hard, learn to understand the business, and work at bettering your craft, you can improve your odds.

But at the end of the day, it's still luck.

Now, I understand why my peers said this. I have worked hard. I think I write pretty good books. They're telling me my efforts have paid off.

But the writing business isn't like planting a seed and growing a tree. There are many other factors involved. This isn't science, where you can run an experiment and always get a predetermined result.

People really hate to think that we don't have complete control over our lives. In fact, even those meticulous folks who measure out their lives with coffee spoons have less control than they think.

The fact is, you never truly know what's going to happen. You can create incredible works of art, toil your entire life, and never sell a single thing. Landing a big publishing deal is not something within your control.

So focus on what is within your control.

Read. Write. Improve. Submit. Learn. Experiment. Try.

I'm not entitled to all of these good things that are happening in my career. I don't deserve success. And neither does anyone else.

But I can say, with complete candor, that getting lucky is a lot more fun when you work your ass off. :)

So ditch that poisonous sense of entitlement. Don't be bitter if things don't go your way at first. Concentrate on what is within your control, and keep at it because you love it.

Happiness isn't the destination. Where you wind up is determined by luck.

Happiness, true happiness, is the journey that takes you there.

51 comments

Advice For Professional Writers

This blog is called A Newbie's Guide to Publishing, because a lot of what I write about is geared toward unpublished or recently published authors.

Now I'd like to dispense some advice for authors who have a book or two or ten on the shelves, because I keep seeing authors making the same damn mistakes. even after years in this biz.

You hear the phone ringing? It's reality calling. Pick it up and listen.

1. Keep writing. I'm shocked by how many authors I know who haven't had a book published in over a year. I can name more than fifty authors who have seemed to drop off the face of the earth. Yes, I know this business is hard, and rejection is discouraging. But giving up isn't an option. If you can't sell your latest book, write another one. And another. And another. Sheesh.

2. Stop whining. This business is woefully unfair, and involves a great deal of luck. Keep your complaints to yourself, get over it, and see #1.

3. Stop fretting about reviews. I know it's difficult when some brain donor on Amazon gives you one star without reading past page 3. Everyone has an opinion, and all opinions are valid, so get over it. Criticism (and for that matter, praise) is pointless after the book has been published. You don't need other people's opinions to be happy.

4. Don't compare yourself to other authors. Ever. Never ever. Someone will always have a bigger advance, better sales, more awards, bigger movie deals, and a much better publisher than you do. This isn't a competition, and envy is just as useless as worry, regret, and guilt.

5. Keep your ego in check. You are not all that. Your writing isn't that great. And anything good that has happened to you in your career is more about luck than about anything you've personally done. Get over yourself, be thankful and gracious, and always remember where you came from.

6. Celebrate. It's so easy to get so bogged down by details that you can forget you're a published author, which is pretty damn cool. Any time something good happens, take some time and luxuriate in it.

7. Promote. As much as you can. If you're not good at it, get good at it. The more you do, the more you'll sell. The more you sell, the longer you'll survive.

Now you might say, "But Joe, Author X doesn't do any of these, and he/she is wildly successful."

True. But Author X is also a dick. And I'm not the only one who thinks that.

Don't be a dick.

Lecture over. Ignore at your own peril.

19 comments

Keeping Up

Planting the seed isn't enough to ensure it grows.

Plants need attention. Water. Sunlight. Pruning. Fertilizer. Insecticide.

Planting is tough. But the work doesn't end there.

Maintenance and upkeep is a never-ending process.

Which brings us to one of my Achilles heels. And perhaps one of yours as well.

I'm great at planting. Maintaining, not so much.

For those who haven't caught the obvious analogy to marketing yet, let me drive the point home.

If you want to sell books by using the Internet, maintenance is essential.

When was the last time you updated your website?

When was the last time you blogged?

Traded links?

Friended people on MySpace, Facebook, Shelfari, or Goodreads?

Participated in a forum?

Having an online presence doesn't mean building it and the forgetting it. It means constant upkeep, diligent attention to what visitors want, and an ongoing addition of quality content.

You can't ever rest on your laurels.

I've been buried in writing for the past few weeks. Which is great —I'm lucky to have contracts and deadlines. But this isn't an excuse for lapsing on my net maintenance.

A good website or blog will keep attracting new visitors.

But new content is what keeps visitors coming back.

Don't forget your site maintenance. You worked too hard planting the seed to let it die.

Now stop screwing around on my blog and go tend to your garden.

9 comments

Discipline

If you're a writer, there are many hurdles to overcome.

You have to commit to writing whenever you can, and then bludgeoning that prose into the best it can be.

Then you have to diligently search for an agent, and for a publisher (or several agents and publishers, as few writers stick with one.)

You must seek out new markets while maintaining relationships with old ones.

You have to keep in touch with the public through online social networks and face-to-face.

You must battle criticism, self-doubt, and apathy, and stay current with industry happenings.

And all the while, your only true boss is you.

So unless you have a great deal of self-control and determination, you will undoubtedly slack off once and a while.

A few weeks probably won't hurt. A few months won't help. A year or longer and you'll be rebuilding your career from the ground up.

Not an easy task for writers. There are so many failures for so few successes, and not many ways to truly measure the impact of your efforts. This means that success or failure is largely arbitrary, based on your personal goals, And those goals can change. This can result in lesser efforts, which almost always yield lesser results.

So how do you maintain the discipline required to succeed? Especially when success seems so elusive?

1. Set Goals. The only goals worth setting are those you have control over. *Getting published* or *becoming a bestseller* are not goals. Those are dreams. Goals are *sending out ten queries in December* and *writing five pages a day*. These are doable, and the first step to keeping on track.

2. Make Time. All the goals in the world won't mean anything unless your prioritize them. That will probably mean sacrificing other things to devote yourself to your goals.

3. Regiment. Any long-term goal requires determination, implementation, and repetition. We don't have to force ourselves to do things we love. And while we may love some aspects of writing, there are certainly things we don't enjoy. You are your own boss, and your boss has to be a hard-ass.

4. Reward. The more realistic goals you make and shoot for, the more productive you'll become. When you do reach a goal, celebrate by rewarding yourself. It might be with something simple, like a cup of coffee when you finish two pages, or something big, like a trip to Paris when you finish the book. But all work and no play is a sure way to burn out.

5. Heal. You'll have setbacks, guaranteed. And these setbacks may make you want to ditch your goals, your regimen, and the whole silly business. There are many ways to overcome adversity, such as ignoring it,

working through it, commiserating with friends, mourning, reflecting, and reinventing yourself. But, ultimately, the only thing that heals wounds is time, so forgive yourself if it takes a while to get back on the horse. And if you never do get back on, this wasn't the career for you in the first place.

If you choose to write (or if writing chose you) then you have to be relentless in the pursuit of your goals. If you settle for less, your expectations will be met. Demand more from yourself.

The winners are the ones who never gave up. Be a winner.

Now get back to work.

18 comments

What I Know

I've been blogging for almost five years, and am closing in on 500 blog posts all about the publishing industry.

As a result, this blog gets a lot of hits from people who don't know who I am. That's the point. As I've said many times, anyone can find you on the net if they're looking for you. The goal is to have people find you when they're looking for something else.

That said, I often get emailed questions that are already answered in my blog. On one hand, a newbie author discovering me is anxious to get answers, and often enthusiastically fires off questions to me without reading all 500 of my posts. On the other hand, anyone who wants to succeed in publishing needs to be in it for the long haul. This is a marathon, not a sprint. Reading all of my entries does a lot more than simply familiarizing you with my writing. It's an encapsulation of how this business works, and how one writer views it.

So it's worth it to the read old posts.

But it's almost 2010. We're in a technological tsunami. Instant gratification isn't fast enough for us.

So here's a blog post that distills the essence of what I've learned in this biz.

Luck Is Important

I say this all the time. In fact, I think it's the #1 factor in determining success in this business. But I've never specifically identified what luck is.

In essence: Getting someone within the industry with enough power and money to recognize they can make money from your work. That's luck. It involves having the right book, in the right place, at the right time. Too soon, too late, wrong person, not good enough —these all can minimize your luck. But hard work, paying attention, and being willing to roll with the punches and accept criticism can maximize your luck.

Still, at the end of the day, it always comes down to a roll of the dice. No one said it would be fair, easy, or fun. But if this is your dream, it is worthwhile to pursue it.

Why do I pursue it?

First, because I love to tell stories. I think it's a fundamental part of the human experience.

Second, because making a living doing something I love is the whole point of life.

Third, because I'm ensuring my little place in history. The most important thing I can do as a human being is be a good husband and father. And yet, who remembers husbands and fathers? How many can you name that you don't personally know?

But writers —everyone can name a dozen writers. That I'm able to reach people, and at the same time become immortal through my work; that speaks to to the essence of what I believe humanity is.

As a species, we love to create things. I'm doing my part and making my mark, in a way that makes me thrilled to be alive.

Understand The Industry

The publishing industry is broken. No doubt about it. Any business that allows returns, where a 50% sell-through is considered successful, where no one can figure out why things succeed or fail, is fundamentally flawed.

But the more you know about how things work, the better you can manipulate the system.

Good decision-making comes down to facts. The better informed you are, the likelier your decisions will be correct.

Listen. Ask questions. Follow examples. Experiment. Take chances. Stay alert.

The Harder You Try, The More Books You'll Sell

You will not become a bestseller by doing all the things I tell you to do, no matter how logical or well-informed I appear.

You will not become a bestseller through your blog, your touring, your speaking efforts, your internet efforts, or you social networks.

The only way you will become a bestseller is to have your books available, at a discount, in as many places as possible. And that's beyond your control.

That said, every little thing you do to sell your books can help your career.

Books sell one at a time. If you're the one that sells them, one at a time, its one more that probably would not have sold without your efforts.

The Race Is With Yourself

You can't ever compare yourself to any other writer. EVER. This isn't like the business world, where certain positions have a salary range. You can make $100 a year, or $5,000,000 a year, with no discernible difference in your output or your quality.

If you want to compare yourself to someone, compare yourself to yourself. Monitor your successes. Learn from your failures (and if you aren't failing, you aren't trying hard enough.) Try different things, make mistakes, grow, adapt, evolve.

Your peers are a tool you can use to better yourself. But they are NEVER something to aspire to.

Your only aspirations should be within your control. Which brings us to:

Set Achievable Goals

Goals should be within your power. In other words, anything that involves a *yes* or *no* from another human being isn't a goal, it's a dream.

You can and should dream, and dream big. But "I want to be a bestseller" isn't a goal. "I want to attend three writing conferences this year, polish my novel, and send queries to ten agents by November" is a goal.

Learn the difference. And don't forget to reward yourself when you reach those goals.

Love It

The term "tortured artist" is an oxymoron. Art is not food, clothing, or shelter. Art is what we do to express and entertain ourselves. If you slave over your writing, I recommend finding something more enjoyable to do. Life is too short, and too many bad things happen, to waste time making yourself miserable.

No one ever gets farmer's block. No one ever bitches about being too uninspired to wait tables.

If writing is so hard, perhaps you should find something easier.

This may seem to run contrary to:

Make Sacrifices

Nothing worthwhile in life is easy. Victory is sweetest when it's hard-won.

You shouldn't EVER believe you deserve anything, or that you're entitled to success. But if you want to reach your writing goals, it often involves giving up other things in order to focus on writing.

You need to love writing. In fact, you need to love it so much you're willing to give up other things that other people (perhaps even you) deem important.

How do you know if your love is strong enough and worth the sacrifice?

When you write THE END, if it isn't the coolest feeling in the world, perhaps you should consider a different career.

But if writing THE END is so fulfilling that it was worth giving up TV, sleep, food, sex, and surfing the internet, then you're in the right profession.

Get Used To Insecurity

As a writer, you'll have the biggest ego in the world, and no ego at all, at the same time.

Money will sometimes be plentiful, and sometimes be scarce.

You'll have major accomplishments, and major setbacks. Your mood will swing on a daily basis.

Some dreams will come true. Some will be murdered.

There are no guarantees.

This business is unstable, and being an artist, you're probably a bit unstable to begin with. These things can feed on each other. Doubt, insecurity, and depression, are all part of the career.

There will be long periods of waiting. Lots of them.

There will be challenges (and by that, I mean you'll get screwed.)

But you need to roll with the punches. Set-backs are opportunities to grow. Rejections are learning experiences. This is a business, and can't be taken personally.

If you go into this understanding you're in for an emotional roller coaster, you can handle the turns and dips much better.

Know When To Quit

The measure of a human being is what makes them finally give up. The stronger the person, the more they can take.

In my previous blog post, I said that you are the hero in the movie of your life. Act like it.

What do you want? Who do you want to be?

That dictates what you need to do.

Quitting, like admitting you're wrong, is one of the noblest things you can do in life. It says that you understand, and accept. It allows you to grow.

But if you want to conquer, quitting isn't an option. No one ever accomplished anything great by quitting.

Know your limitations. But also know your potential for greatness.

Be Cool

Gracious. Grateful. Easy going. Helpful. Fun. Giving. Thankful. Courteous. Honest.

In other words, be a nice person.

While "nice" doesn't mean "successful", it does mean you'll sleep better at night.

I believe a successful life is one where people miss you when you die.

As a writer, you have the potential for a great many people to miss you.

But not if you're a dick.

There. Now you don't have to read 500 blog entries.

Happy New Year! See you in 2010!

I have a feeling it will be the best year ever...

58 comments

A Writer Looks At 40

As I finish my fourth decade, I'm taking a self-indulgent moment to reflect and dwell on what brought me to this point in my writing career.

1970 - Born. No star in the sky. No manger. Mom certainly wasn't a virgin. But I was born on Easter Sunday.

1978 - Put together a crude collection of drawings called Crappy Cartoons, staple-bound, thirty pages long.

1980 - Am taken out of my grammar school and placed in a two-year accelerated program for gifted kids. Write short stories that are ten times longer than my peers', but don't win any Young Authors contests.

1982 - Begin writing in class during lecture periods, passing stories back and forth to my friends while the teachers aren't looking. Over the next few years this collection of jokes and cartoons grows to more than 1000 pages long.

1983 - At my friend Jim Coursey's house, I'm playing with his Apple IIe and am amazed a typewriter can actually save text. We write a parody private eye story, featuring a sleazy detective named Harry McGlade.

1985 - Convinced I'll someday be a filmmaker, I get a video camera for Christmas. I shoot many movies of the neighborhood kids, being humorously hacked to death by masked maniacs. Visit the butcher shop for organs, and use pumps and tubes for blood squirting.

1987 - Get my first word processor for my birthday, a Brother. Begin writing a lot of short stories, many featuring Harry McGlade. Also write a play for the school's synchonized swimming team (?!) and it's performed for three nights. I play the villain. And no, I don't get in the pool.

1988 Part 1 - Graduate high school as part of a rap trio called The White Suburban Boys. We may actually have been the first white rappers. I write and perform over ten funny rap songs about white middle class suburban life, and we get a small cult following. Voted Class Clown of '88.

1988 Part 2 - Take my first real creative writing class in Columbia College in Chicago. Get a C. But I get an A in Film Tech, and my movie INVADER is shown at some local Chicago festivals. You can watch it, and some of my other early movies, HERE. I also get my first rejection letter, from Playboy, for a Harry McGlade Story.

1989 - Take more creative writing classes. Get more Cs. But I'm writing in earnest, lots of short stories in many genres. Also write and perform in an improv comedy show called The Caravan O'Laughs.

1990 - Write three screenplays, go to LA for two weeks, not knowing anyone, knocking on agents doors and trying to get my scripts seen. Get meetings with half a dozen film agents, but no one calls back.

1991 - Switch my college major from film to TV, thinking it will be easier to get work. Now have four book-length collections of short stories, which I print and bind at Kinko's and charge my friends $15 each for.

1992 - Graduate college, and can't find a TV job. Begin series of part time jobs to support myself, while working on my first novel. I finish it in three months. It's called DEAD ON MY FEET, about a guy dying of cancer. His name is Phineas Troutt. His walking death sentence leads him to a life of crime. Cameos by Harry McGlade, and a Chicago cop named Jack Daniels.

1993 - Find an agent who loves DEAD ON MY FEET. Write another novel, with Jack Daniels as the hero, called THE GINGERBREAD MAN. Give that to my agent.

1994 - In 18 months, my agent only shows my books to 2 publishers. I fire him, and start racking up rejections.

1995 - Write a third thriller called THREE WAY. Get a hundred rejections.

1996 - Write a fourth thriller called THE LADYKILLER. Get a hundred rejections.

1997 -Write a fifth thriller called EVERYBODY DIES. Get a hundred rejections.

1998 - Write a sixth thriller called SHOT OF TEQUILA. Almost land an agent, who likes it a lot but thinks it's too hardboiled. I'm now up to over 450 rejections.

1999 - Write a technothriller called ORIGIN. Land an agent. :)

2000 - My agent can't sell ORIGIN. Begin work on another technothriller.

2001 - Finish my thriller THE LIST. Agent can't sell it. I now have had more than five hundred rejections. Begin work on a medical thriller.

2002 - Finish my thriller DISTURB. Agent hates it, won't rep it. I dig out my old mystery novel THE GINGERBREAD MAN, and rewrite it from the first page to the last. Studying the mystery market, I decide to change Jack Daniels from a man into a woman, and release it under the unisex "J.A. Konrath." I also use Harry McGlade and Phineas Troutt as supporting characters.

2003 - WHISKEY SOUR sells in a three book deal worth $110,000. It's enough for me to write full time.

2004 - WHISKEY SOUR comes out. I buy my first computer, and begin to learn all I can about the publishing industry to figure out how I can succeed. Begin to experiment with self promotion on the Internet, and in person. I rewrite THE LADYKILLER, turning it into BLOODY MARY. I start selling short stories in earnest, making my first big sale to Ellery Queen.

2005 -Start a blog called **A Newbie's Guide to Publishing**, to share what I've learned about the industry. My publisher sends me to a warehouse, where I sign 3500 copies of my books. They also send me on a West Coast tour, to six cities. I use a rental car, and do drop-in signings at more than 120 stores. I write RUSTY NAIL, and begin to teach writing and marketing at a local community college. I sign a second three book deal with Hyperion, for $125,000. I also edit and sell an anthology called THESE GUNS FOR HIRE.

2006 -To promote RUSTY NAIL, I visit 612 bookstores in 29 states. I write DIRTY MARTINI. I begin giving away ebooks of my early, unsold novels on my website. I also continue to sell short stories and write articles for Writer's Digest.

2007 - Write FUZZY NAVEL. My publisher decides not to tour me. I continue to self-promote as much as I can afford. I rewrite ORIGIN and ask my agent to shop it around. It gets rejected by everybody. I write an action screenplay called THE SITE. No takers. You can read THE SITE for free **HERE**.

2008 - Write CHERRY BOMB, and a horror novel called AFRAID. Hyperion decides to drop their mystery line, me included, even though my first three novels have earned out their advance. My Italian publisher flies me to Italy to tour me. It takes my agent six months to sell AFRAID, in a two book deal for only $20k per book. My agent shops around a proposal for a seventh Jack Daniels novel. No takers. I'm worried about my career, even though my blog and website reach more than 1 million hits.

2009 - Do a blog tour to promote AFRAID, appearing on a hundred blogs in a month. Then I do a regular tour, signing at 200 bookstores. Kindle owners ask me to put my free ebook downloads on Amazon, since they can't convert pdfs. Amazon won't let me put them up for free, so I charge $1.99. They start selling like crazy. By the end of the year, my rejected novels ORIGIN, THE LIST, SHOT OF TEQUILA, DISTURB, and my previously published short stories have sold 27,000 copies, and are paying my rent. My free kindle story SERIAL, written with Blake Crouch, is downloaded over 200,000 times.

AFRAID earns out its advance on its first royalty statement. I write TRAPPED, the sequel. My editors don't like it. I rewrite it from the ground up, and the still don't like it. I write a sci-fi novel called TIMECASTER and sell it and a sequel to Ace for an embarrassingly small amount of money because I'm so worried about my future.

2010 - Write another Jack Kilborn novel, called ENDURANCE. My editors want changes. I refuse to make them. We're now deciding how to proceed. I also sign a three book deal with a bestselling author to co-write three thrillers. The deal will earn me more than 1 million dollars. Can't reveal the details yet. The seventh Jack Daniels novel, SHAKEN, is now in the contract phase with a terrific publisher. Can't reveal the details yet. But things are certainly looking up.

Final stats:

- By March, I've sold over 35,000 ebooks in just a year.
- Google "jakonrath.blogspot.com" and you'll get over 300,000 hits.
- I currently have seven books in print, in eleven different countries, to the tune of several hundred thousand copies.
- I've sold over seventy short stories and articles to magazines and anthologies.
- I've sold two film options on my works.
- I've mailed out 7000 promotional letters to libraries, and signed at more than 1200 bookstores in 39 states.
- My Jack Daniels series, which my publisher dropped, is among their top 50 bestselling titles on Kindle.
- In the next 18-24 months, I'll have six novels coming out, possibly more.
- I'm now making $4k a month on Kindle. When Amazon switches to the agency model in June, I expect to be making $10k.

I still have goals. Still have dreams. But I'm in a very good position right now.

I finally have enough money to ease up on all the non-stop self promotion.

I've met a lot of great people. Made a lot of good friends.

Looking back on all the ups and down, successes and failures, near-misses and lucky breaks, I realize something...

I'm happy. I may be the happiest damn person on the planet.

So how am I going to spend today, my 40th birthday?

I could spend it celebrating the terrific ride I've had so far.

I could spend it worrying about the future.

I could spend it regretting the many mistakes I've made and failures I've had.

I could spend it patting myself on the back for a job well done.

But I'm not going to do any of those things.

Instead, I'm going to spend the day with my one true love. The one thing that has kept me going through the good and the bad, the ups and the downs.

Today, I'm writing.

I'm actually going to put words on a page, and get paid for those words. And I'm going to love every goddamn minute of it.

After all, who else is lucky enough to do what they love for a living?

Then later tonight, I'm getting plastered and jumping the wife. ;)

46 comments

ABOUT JOE

J. A. Konrath

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Born: 1970, Skokie, IL.
Occupation: Novelist
Genres: Mystery, Thriller, Horror
Influences: F. Paul Wilson, Thomas Harris, Robert B. Parker, Ed McBain, John D. MacDonald, Rob Kantner, Dave Barry, Lawrence Block, Donald E. Westlake / Richard Stark

Joseph Andrew Konrath (born 1970, in Skokie, Ill.) is a fiction writer working in the mystery, thriller, and horror genres. He writes as J. A. Konrath.

Biography

Konrath graduated from Columbia College in Chicago in 1992 and spent the next 12 years garnering close to five hundred rejections for nine unpublished novels. His tenth book, Whiskey Sour, was picked up by Hyperion in 2003. It was the first in a series featuring Lt. Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels of the Chicago Police Department. He's since published dozens of short stories and articles, been translated into eight languages, and edited an anthology called These Guns for Hire for Bleak House Books.

Konrath's books are known for combining humor with terror. His work has been translated into ten languages.

He's also known in the writing community for his work in self-promotion. Konrath believes that writers must play a large part in marketing their own books, and his blog, A Newbie's Guide to Publishing, focuses on this. He has outspoken and somewhat controversial views on advertising, the publishing industry, and internet publicity.

In 2006, Konrath mailed out close to 7000 letters to libraries across the United States with fellow mystery author Julia Spencer-Fleming, touting their books to librarians.

Later that year, Konrath signed books in 612 bookstores across 28 states. The booksellers he met on this three month journey were thanked by name in the acknowledgments of his fourth novel, Dirty Martini.

Under the name Jack Kilborn, he penned the novel Afraid for Headline UK/Grand Central.

Konrath's website features many free downloads, including three full novels.

Bibliography

Novels

* Cherry Bomb (2009) - 6th in Jack Daniels series ISBN 1401302815
* Afraid (2008) - Under the pseudonym Jack Kilborn ISBN 0755346009
* Fuzzy Navel (2008) - 5th in Jack Daniels series ISBN 1401302807
* Dirty Martini (2007) - 4th in Jack Daniels series ISBN 1401302793
* Rusty Nail (2006) - 3rd in Jack Daniels series ISBN 140130088X
* Bloody Mary (2005) - 2nd in Jack Daniels series ISBN 0786890746
* Whiskey Sour (2004) - 1st in Jack Daniels series ISBN 078689072X

Tie-In Stories

* "On the Rocks" (Featuring Jack Daniels, first published in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine (EQMM)
* "With a Twist" (Featuring Jack Daniels, EQMM)
* "Body Shots" (Featuring Jack Daniels, Amazon Shorts)
* "Whelp Wanted" (Featuring Harry McGlade, Futures Mysterious Anthology Magazine)
* "Taken to the Cleaners" (Featuring Harry McGlade, The Strand Magazine)
* "Street Music" (Featuring Phineas Troutt, EQMM)
* "Epitaph" (Featuring Phineas Troutt, Thriller edited by James Patterson)
* "Suffer" (Featuring Phineas Troutt, EQMM)
* "Bereaved" (Featuring Phineas Troutt, These Guns for Hire, edited by J. A. Konrath)
* "Potshot" (Featuring Herb Benedict, Amazon Shorts)
* "The One That Got Away" (Featuring The Gingerbread Man, Amazon Shorts)
* "Suckers" (Featuring Harry McGlade) novella co-written by Jeff Strand
* "The Necro File" (Featuring Harry McGlade, first published in Like A Chinese Tattoo)
* "Last Request" (Featuring Phineas Troutt)
* "Overproof" (Featuring Jack Daniels, first published in Chicago Blues edited by Libby Fischer Hellmann)

Other Short Stories

* "The Agreement" (Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine (AHMM))
* "Symbios" (Apex Digest)
* "Forgiveness" (Cemetery Dance)
* "Light Drizzle" (Crimespree Magazine)
* "The Shed" (Surreal Magazine)
* "Finicky Eater" (Horror Garage Magazine)
* "The Screaming" (The Many Faces of Van Helsing, edited by Jeanne Cavelos)
* "Don't Press That Button!" (James Bond in the 21st Century, edited by Glenn Yeffeth)
* "The Bag" (Cold Flesh, edited by Paul Fry)
* "The Big Guys, He Bites, A Matter of Taste" (Small Bites, edited by Garrett Peck and Keith Gouveia)
* "Appalachian Lullabye" (Requiem for the Radioactive Monkey, edited by John Weagley)
* "Lying Eyes" (Twisted Tongue Magazine)
* "Redux" (Spooks, edited by Tina L. Jens & John Everson)

* "The Conversation" (Hard Luck Stories)
* "A Fistful of Cozy" (Shots Magazine UK)
* "Mr. Pull Ups" (Tales From the Red Lion, edited by Tina L. Jens and John Weagley)
* "Punishment" (Like A Chinese Tattoo, edited by Bill Breedlove)
* "The Confession" (Like A Chinese Tattoo, edited by Bill Breedlove)
* "Them's Good Eats" (Gratia Placenti, edited by Jason Sizemore & Gill Ainsworth)
* "Lying Eyes" (Twisted Tongue #2)
* "The Sound of Blunder" co-written with F. Paul Wilson (Blood Lite, edited by Kevin J. Anderson)
* "S.A." (Wolfsbane & Misteltoe, edited by Charlaine Harris & Toni L.P. Kelner)

Unpublished Novels

All off these books are available as free downloads at Konrath's website.

* Origin - A thriller about Satan being studied in a secret government compound.
* The List - A thriller about a cop who discovers he, and several others, are clones of famous historical figures.
* Disturb - A thriller about a new legal insomnia drug with deadly side effects.
* 55 Proof - A collection of short stories.

Audio

Konrath's books are available through Brilliance Audio. Dick Hill and Suzie Breck are the voice talents, doing characters in dialect and making the reading sound like a play. Konrath also voices some characters on these productions, and also records short stories as an extra bonus.

Continuing Characters

* Jack Daniels - A forty-something Chicago Homicide Lieutenant.
* Herb Benedict - Her fifty-something partner.
* Phineas Troutt - Jack's criminal friend, currently dying of pancreatic cancer.
* Harry McGlade - Jack's ex-partner, now a private eye.

Awards and Recognition

* 2008 Dirty Martini was on the final ballot for the Barry Award for best novel
* 2007 "Epitaph" was on the final ballot for the British Dagger Award for best short story
* 2006 Bob Kellog Humanitarian Award (www.bksp.org)
* 2005 Love is Murder Award Best Police Procedural (Bloody Mary)
* 2005 Ellery Queen Reader's Choice Award, 2nd Place ("With a Twist")
* 2004 Whiskey Sour was on the final ballot for the Anthony, Macavity, and Gumshoe Awards for best debut novel

* 2004 "On the Rocks" was on the final ballot for the Robert L. Fish Award for best short story
* 2004 Love is Murder Award Best Debut Novel (Whiskey Sour)
* 2004 Derringer Award for Flash Fiction ("The Big Guys")
* 2003 Gross Out Contest Winner, World Horror Con

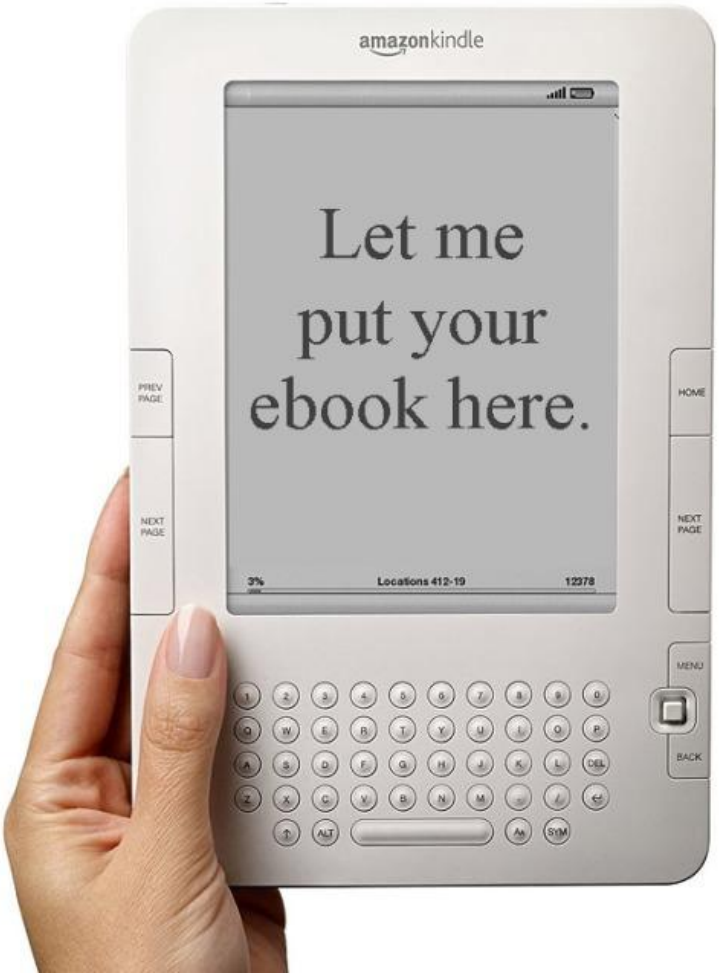
External links

www.JAKonrath.com
www.jakonrath.blogspot.com
www.myspace.com/jakonrath

JA Konrath Kindle Ebooks

Whiskey Sour
Bloody Mary
Rusty Nail
Dirty Martini
Fuzzy Navel
Cherry Bomb
Afraid
Origin
The List
Disturb
Shot of Tequila
55 Proof (Short Story Omnibus)
Jack Daniels Stories (Collected Stories)
Crime Stories (Collected Stories)
Horror Stories (Collected Stories)
Truck Stop
Suckers by JA Konrath and Jeff Strand
Planter's Punch by JA Konrath and Tom Schreck
SERIAL UNCUT by Blake Crouch and Jack Kilborn
Floaters by JA Konrath and Henry Perez
Dumb Jokes & Vulgar Poems

Visit Joe Konrath at www.JAKonrath.com
Visit Barry Eisler at www.BarryEisler.com
Visit Rob Siders (who formatted this ebook) at www.52Novels.com



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"I've worked with Rob Siders for years, and heartily recommend him. He's the very best, and makes the seemingly impossible possible." — JA Konrath