

# Guerrilla tactics for marketing and selling your book



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# Contents

Introduction	1
The name of your publishing company	3
Pricing	5
Timing	8
The physical package	9
Pre-publication activity	14
Marketing	27
Literary agents	39
Foreign language sales	40
Checklist	41
Conclusion	46
Glossary of marketing terms	47



# Introduction

Congratulations, you're about to become a published author. It's a lovely feeling, isn't it? You will soon realise though that you're very far from alone - there are some 80,000 new books published in the UK every year, which you'll probably agree is quite a lot of books. So, in this vast ocean of literature, what do you need to do to get people to notice and (we hope) buy your book?

This short guide is intended to give you some basic tactics to ensure your book is made available to as many people as possible. Most of it is sensible, achievable advice that comes straight from the Infinite Authors team of sales and marketing experts. If you use it wisely, plan your campaign and are dedicated to your goals it will result in publicity and sales for your book. It assumes that you don't have the budget to appoint your own PR and/or marketing consultant to help you (though that may not be as costly an option as you may think), in fact that you don't actually have a budget to do very much at all. This isn't about spend, it's about effort, nous and to some extent common sense.

We won't recommend that you write a one-hundred page marketing plan and back it up with a ton of spreadsheets. We aim to give you some basic tools that you can use immediately and which come out of our own experience as publishers. And that's what you are too: a publisher as well as an author. If we help you to achieve success then we'll be very happy, too. If there's something that you need to know that isn't covered by this advice then let us know, pronto.

What we're offering here are some tried and tested techniques that with a fair wind can help your book take off. Of course there are no guarantees in this. You only have to look at the big publishers and how much time and money they lavish on some of their authors only to achieve poor sales to know that there are no certainties when it comes to selling your book. Further, look at some of the major successes of the least few years (*Harry Potter* and *Eats, Shoots and Leaves*, for example). They spluttered on to the market with next to no initial impact and the rest, to borrow, change and misquote the tragically irritating Dane, is history.

Your sales and marketing efforts should begin as soon as you've taken the decision to publish, so let's start with the basics.

# 1. The name of your publishing company

'Hang on a second,' we hear you cry, 'I am a writer, not a publisher. What does it matter what name I publish under?' Well, we'd strongly advise against such (forgive us) tunnel vision. Yes, you're a writer but you're also a publisher. You're setting up your own imprint and you should think a little about what this should be called.

Of course you can take the easy option and name your business 'Norman Bates Publishing' if you're called Norman Bates (well, you can do that even if you're not). But that may look a wee bit parochial. It's up to you, but if you've written a romantic novel think of a name that reflects the genre you're involved in. Love and Romance Press, for example (c'mon, you can do better than that! Heaving Breasts Publishing, that's much more like it). If it's a book about dog training, call it Dog Lovers' Books. You get the picture.

Why is this important? Well, there's still some prejudice in the conventional world of books and bookselling against self-publishing, so to overcome this it's quite a good idea to at least give the impression that you're first and foremost an independent publisher whose first book just happens to be written by you. Who knows, it might be that, buoyed by the success of your first book, you go on to build a publishing empire based on books by other people. There are plenty of precedents for this. Household publishing names such as Dummies, Lonely Planet and Rough Guides (to name just a few) all began from one so-called self-published book.



## 2. Pricing

How much is your magnum opus going to cost readers? It's critical to get this right at the very beginning. Our advice to you is to consider two issues here, notably:

- The industry norm for similar books;
- Your margin, taking into account your production costs and (where relevant) book trade discount.

Start by researching similar books on Amazon. If you're publishing a paperback novel aimed at the Catherine Cookson readership, it's not wise to price it at £30. If the genre you're working in usually commands a cover price of £7.99–£9.99 then pitch your book accordingly. You can try to negotiate price reductions through the big (probably online) retailers, but your RRP (recommended retail price, for the uninitiated) is the crucial figure.

You can of course pitch lower than the market and try to attract business primarily by price. But we'd urge some caution in doing that. What message might that give off? Could it look a little desperate? It's your call but if the sector usually commands a price of £9.99 and you pitch in at £3.99 (even if you can make money on this after your

costs) it may well mean that you don't sell many more copies than if you'd stuck to full price. You will probably be just chucking margin away. Yes, every chain bookshop in the country uses pricing as its key marketing tool, but this tends to be for established big-name authors or TV tie-ins where the bookshops are having to compete with online and supermarket discounts. It's your call of course, but we'd urge you initially to research the correct RRP and stick to it. You can always discount later when the book takes off.

If you're publishing something that is 'must have' and information based, for a particular industry sector, be bold. Say it's a book about the complexity of international tax planning and is aimed at a very discrete targeted market of high level international tax planners. They are going to buy your book (well, if you tell them about it at least) almost regardless of price. It's not unusual for publishers to price certain books very highly if that information is not available from any other source.

In this scenario consider yourself as much a consultant as an author. Would you, as a consultant, give your time away? No, of course not. So don't give your expertise away in book form. Again, look at Amazon and see what prices are being charged for comparable books.

As with more general books we'd urge you not to be tempted to undercut competitors. Say there's a similar tax book published by a long-standing competitor at £100. You may be tempted to pitch yours at £50, but what message would this send to a potential purchaser? After all, if someone is interested in specialist knowledge they'll be prepared to pay for it. Deliberately undercutting competitors may just look like you're offering an inferior product and could have the reverse effect you want by actually putting people off buying from you.

One tactic to consider however, might be a pre-publication offer. This is used by a lot of big publishers as it generates cash early in the book's life, which is always a nice thing. It's simple really. Announce your book two to three months in advance of publication, but offer a discount for advance orders. If the publication date is, say, 31 January and the published price is £125, you could offer the book at £100 for all paid orders received by 14 January, for example. That's great for your cash flow and is a common tactic used within the industry. We'd suggest you only make this offer direct to potential consumers rather than the book trade. There's more on direct marketing on page 35.

# 3. Timing

Is your book time-sensitive? If so, when is a perfect time to publish? If it's a book on skiing, for example, you should launch in September perhaps, when people are considering booking their winter holidays. Christmas is difficult even with local press as there's usually so much going on from bad weather to the local panto. Avoid if you can publishing when there are major national events such as a royal wedding, a World Cup or the Olympics (unless of course your book is specifically relevant to the event itself).

Think (and sorry if this is hurtful) that your book may be perceived as 'filler' for the media: of some interest to some of their readers or listeners but not if there are any events of global interest competing (for more on the media see page 31).

Might there be a special day that is particularly pertinent to your book's subject? National Asthma Day or National Sausage Month might prove a useful platform (if your book is about sausages or asthma, obviously). Special days and events can be found easily on the internet.

# 4. The physical package

You will already have decided on some of your book's attributes when you bought your Infinite Authors package; attributes such as whether the book is in colour, whether it's illustrated, how long it is and whether it's a hardback or paperback. There are two crucial other elements to get right when it comes to marketing your book:

- The title. Does it make it clear what the book is about? Does the book have a subtitle? Does it need a subtitle?
- The jacket or cover.

## **Title**

Ask people you trust for their response to your proposed title and do try to get their honest opinion. One problem with self-publishing is that the author doesn't have the benefit of asking somebody less close to the book (i.e. a publisher) for advice on decisions such as what to call the book. Something may be crystal clear to you but will it be apparent to a potential purchaser what a book is about, just from reading the title and subtitle? So ask around.

## Cover or jacket

In the golden days of publishing, when the cynical old hacks at Infinite Ideas were wee innocents, there used to be a test for a book's jacket. Could it pass the twenty-foot test; in other words could a possible purchaser look at a book face-out on a bookshelf from afar and see what the book was about? Well perhaps in this digital age we should change this into the twenty-second test. Will someone understand what your book is about from a cursory, probably online, glance at the cover, title and subtitle?

Think of the books you own. Some have illustrated covers, some typographical. That's your first choice and as a general rule of thumb you can get away with a typographical approach for books of an academic or professional nature, where the content is key. However, if you're publishing fiction, poetry or travel writing, for example, all genres which typically use illustrated covers, you need to consider spending a little on a professionally designed cover.

Of course, you may be a great writer *and* a talented designer, in which case you can save yourself a few bob. Unless you are graphically trained, however, there is a very strong chance that if you attempt to design your jacket yourself at best it will look like something the vet has surgically removed from inside a German Shepherd.

Designing illustrated book jackets is a craft. Many are works of art in their own right. A badly designed jacket is the first thing that people will notice and it will put them off. It will smack of amateurism. We've seen it so many times before where authors have tried to insist on using their own artwork or photographs. Invariably it looks terrible. We'd urge you to go for a professionally designed jacket if you possibly can afford it. It really will help people to take your book seriously and make it stand out.

Now think about the copy you put on the physical book. Try to describe your book in simple and succinct language. Don't overcomplicate the message. And think too of the message your words give to a reader. If you use highfalutin polysyllables all the way through you might think you're expressing your own deep knowledge of the English language and generally being intellectually terribly impressive. The chances are though that you might just come across as a verbose, pretentious, intellectual twit and no one who is a verbose, pretentious, intellectual twit sells many books except for a certain Mr Fry (sorry Stephen).

So don't be tempted to show off in your jacket blurb. To help you in this process, look at similar books published by mainstream publishers. What is their tone of voice? How do they attract their readers? And what do they say about their authors?

Again – don't show off. You might well have a PhD in Applied Statistics from Harvard but is that really going to appeal to someone tempted to buy your book about fly fishing? No, not really. So be truthful, factual, relevant and restrained.

Copy writing is a skill and to the uninitiated it can prove very difficult. So once you've written your proposed copy, put it in a drawer and ignore it for a few days. Then get it out and have a reread. Does it express what you really want it to? If someone came across this copy on a book in a bookshop or online might it attract or repel them?

Remember too that if people enjoy your first book they will want to buy more of your work. So, if this book is part of a trilogy, or the character is going to appear in future works, it's quite valid to include that in your copy. In fact, it's essential. If you have a website, put that down too – the more contact you can have with your readers the better.

## **Caveat no. 1**

It's very easy as we know to get a book printed. Anyone can do it. But to *publish* a book, that's different. As a self-published author, people will compare your book with other titles in bookshops published by mainstream houses and so you need to do everything in your power to ensure



your book looks and reads as professionally as possible. Some people out there will be looking to pick holes in your work so that they can disparagingly say, 'Oh, it's just a self-published book.' You have the ability and the power to avoid that criticism by working really hard to make the package you produce as close to perfection as possible. That's why a professionally designed jacket is so important as it is the first thing people will judge your work on (oh, they're a shallow lot, book buyers). And don't forget, if you want advice and support during the process, there's always someone at the end of the phone at Infinite Authors to help. There is no reason at all why you cannot self-publish a book of bookshop quality and that should be your aim.

# 5. Pre-publication activity

Traditional publishers will announce their new books ('front list') to the book trade and trade press a long time in advance of publication. This can be as much as a year ahead. There are good reasons for this as it helps generate interest among booksellers and the press.

However, as a self-published author we'd suggest that, given the expected level of bookshop support (see page 22), it's good to announce your book 4-6 months in advance of publication, if possible.

At the lowest level this means getting the book registered at Nielsen. The sooner you do this the sooner the book is out there on bibliographic databases around the world. This does not automatically mean that anyone will place orders for it but it does mean that your book will be recognisable and orderable through its ISBN. If you have purchased your ISBN through us then we will register your book with Nielsen for you; if you are buying your ISBN directly from Nielsen then their thorough and helpful site will guide you through the registration process.

It's best to put the front cover image and as much descriptive copy as you can on Nielsen's database to make the book look as attractive as possible, even if you decide to change some of the information later on.

Once your ISBN has been accepted by Nielsen the book will feature on bibliographic databases globally. So if someone walks into Waterstone's in Derby and asks for the book it should be on their system and they should be able to order it. Information from Nielsen also feeds automatically to online retailers such as Amazon so the basic information will appear there without any further input from you.

However, you can do more to help your sales at Amazon by getting involved in one of their supplier programmes. The Advantage Programme is costly in terms of margin and really only worthwhile when you have more than one book to sell. The Associates Programme is more suitable if you only have one or two products to sell and want to use your own web site to point people in the direction of Amazon. All the details can be found at <https://affiliate-program.amazon.co.uk> if you're UK based. Alternatively you can register as a seller for your book on Amazon. Start here: <http://services.amazon.co.uk/services/sell-on-amazon/how-it-works/?Id=AZUKSOAFooter>.

We'll discuss trade discount, the margin you give retailers to sell your book, a little later on (see page 21).

## The AI

Nope, not artificial intelligence (there's damn all intelligence, artificial or otherwise in this market, trust me), but advanced information or advanced title information (ATI). These are usually one-page sheets used by publishers and their sales representatives to supply all the information that will persuade retailers to stock a particular book.

We are going to address the issue of bookshop support in a little more detail later on (see page 22) but by producing an AI a couple of months prior to publication you can pre-promote your book with some degree of professionalism. We've provided you with an AI template. Some basic rules for using this effectively are:

- Make sure the basic bibliographic information is filled in accurately. This means that the ISBN is quoted correctly, as are price, binding, pagination, size, publication date, etc. Yup, it's dull, dull, dull and you my friend are so obviously an artist, but it has to be done and it has to be done accurately. So fill it in and check it. Then double check it. Then check it again.
- Include a good quality jacket image. Books are judged by their jackets even in this day and age (apparently 16% of people buy books on the basis of the jacket image alone), so include a good quality image that shows your artwork off in all its glory.

- In the 'About the book' section, try to excite. If it's a novel don't just summarise the plot flatly, instead try to build excitement. Again, read the jacket blurbs of novels you love and admire and see how they deal with the plot. You'll find they entice, tease a little perhaps and make the reader want to find out more. Your one or two paragraph summary should do the same. If you have already written jacket copy that you're happy with you should use this as the basis for the AI copy. But don't be lazy and just cut and paste it. It may need expanding or editing down.
- If it's a non-fiction book you need to think about how to sell the benefits of your book quickly. For example, if it's a personal finance book, you're helping the reader save or make money easily, legally and tax efficiently. If it's a diet book, you're helping the reader lose weight, drop a dress size and look great, all by feasting on grass cuttings. Look at popular books of the same genre and try to replicate the tone of voice their blurbs use.
- Obviously if you're publishing a high-level, academic tome or serious professional book, you do need to ensure the copy you use is factual and accurate. But still hold in your mind the question, 'Why should anyone be interested?' Is it new research that sheds light on an old controversy? Does it broaden people's knowledge? Is it going to be of interest to academics and professionals or the information-hungry layperson, too? Clearly state the aims of and market for the book.

Next think about your author blurb. Again you can use the jacket copy you've already produced as the basis. If you're publishing fiction or poetry then do include any previous publications you've been involved with, information on where you live now, and have lived (see also page 32). It's common sense really. If your novel is about a walnut farmer in the Dordogne, it makes sense to expand a little on your knowledge of the area. So 'been to the Dordogne a lot on holiday' might not be quite as compelling as 'The Dordogne is her second home. She's visited every year since 1982 and knows the area, its people, its culture and its cuisine better than anyone. In fact she was crowned Queen of the Walnuts in the Sarlat Walnut Festival four years in a row ...', kind of thing.

Finally, your AI should include information about how and where people are going to hear about your book. Now obviously this is being prepared in advance of publication so there is an element of guesswork if not wishful thinking creeping in here. Few publishers lie about future coverage and we'd urge you not to do so either. 'Interview in the *Sunday Times* magazine' is great to write if it is genuinely going to happen but assuming it's not you shouldn't tell fibs as you're likely to be found out and your credibility destroyed. What you can do is tickle up some friendly journalist (we'll come to your PR campaign on page 42) and if the *Cockermouth Gazette* says 'Sure - send us a copy

when it's ready' you can hand on heart write 'Review and feature anticipated in the *Cockermouth Gazette*'. As much as anything this exercise is about persuading booksellers that you understand the importance of getting your work out there to be reviewed and spoken about and that you're getting off your backside to make it happen.

There, you have an AI. This can of course be used going forward as the basis of press releases, adverts and fliers and should mean that you don't have to start from scratch every time you need copy. But of course you can amend this document as and when relevant new events occur that are pertinent to the future success of your book. So what do you do with it?

## **The book trade**

We need a healthy dash of brutal honesty here I'm afraid. It is unlikely that your book is going to be stocked widely in the bookstores of the UK on publication date. It is highly unlikely (very, very unlikely) that a Waterstone's buyer is going to receive your AI and think, 'Blimey that looks like a fascinating book from a publisher and author I have never heard of ... I think I'll buy five thousand copies and pile it front of every store ...'. It just won't happen except in such rare cases that we'll make you a promise.

If Waterstone's or WH Smith or any other chain booksellers do contact you wanting to place an order of more than, say, 200 copies, phone us and we'll put you through to our joint MD David Grant who will buy you a bottle of champagne and advise you personally how to supply the order.

But enough cynicism. What can you do to maximise book trade interest in your publication? Where you start with all of this is to send your AI (an email will do in most cases) to the wholesalers Bertrams and Gardners and ask them to list it in their buyers guides (find the current contact details at [www.bertrams.com](http://www.bertrams.com) and [www.gardners.com](http://www.gardners.com)). What these two companies do is to wholesale books to the book trade around the world. They deal with all the major publishers and many independent booksellers prefer to buy everything through them. For the bookseller it saves on administration (only one monthly invoice to settle) and is just generally an effective way to buy books. Both companies also own library suppliers (see page 24). Now, we cannot guarantee that they will respond (favourably or otherwise). Even if they do you may feel that they want too much discount from you (see page 21), but at least getting in touch with them should mean they know about your book.

Your book will already be listed through Nielsen, but the AI will help to alert buyers to its existence. You may consider spending a little money with these two wholesalers to



promote the book through their various catalogues, but in truth we'd advise against this as the level of sales generated by such an advert is unlikely to cover the cost of placing said advert.

The point of having a working relationship with the wholesalers is that they can *service* demand for your book quickly and effectively. We'd advise at this stage against thinking of them as means of *creating* that demand.

## **Discounts**

This is the margin the retailer needs (or at least demands) to make money out of selling books. We're talking about your profit here so think carefully about how you give out discount. Here's a simple rule of thumb guide that we think is workable both for general books (that's mass market fiction, poetry, biography, popular history, self help – the list is endless but you get the drift) and academic/professional books:

- Wholesalers will expect 45% on general books and 35% on academic;
- Bookstores (chain and independent) require 40% on general and 30% on academic;
- Online retailers ask for 30% maximum initially until you build up a relationship with them.

Just so that we're all agreed on terminology here, these discounts are off net prices. If your book is published at £30 and you offer a 40% discount to a customer you will be invoicing them for £18.

These are suggested figures only. They can vary and circumstances arise where you should increase or lower your terms; in particular a local store might be incentivised to support you if you offer them a generous discount. More on that in a minute.

## **Booksellers**

As discussed you're unlikely to be dealing with a head office buyer for a national chain (see the promise above if you do, you lucky person). But individual stores within chains do have some degree of autonomy when it comes to stocking books from local authors. Here's where your AI comes in again. Find out the name of the person responsible for local purchases then send or better still take in person your AI and nicely ask them to stock the book. Offer to do a reading, produce posters and mention their shop in the local press you're guaranteed to get(!) Most will support you to some extent. This can mean anything from taking two copies of your book, putting it on a shelf at the back of the store and paying you for them when and only when they sell a copy ('consignment stock') to offering

a window display and a venue for a launch party. It really depends on the bookseller, how they relate to you and your book, and of course the local market, but as a general rule of thumb you will be supported if you ask nicely and don't expect too much.

Would they run a launch event for you? If they do you'll probably be expected to buy a couple of cases of Norwegian Merlot and some Cheesy Wotsits to help get the event rocking. This will be money well spent in our opinion (we love Cheesy Wotsits at Infinite Authors).

If you do arrange something then please, please, please don't expect that the shop's PR machine will generate so much interest that the crowds will be jostling down the High Street. It won't, trust me. It's down to you to beg, cajole and hassle everyone you've ever known to come along. Children too mortified to attend? Well threaten the little monkeys with a starvation diet and decimation of their pocket money unless they turn up accompanied by their entire school. Get the local press along, have someone take photographs, get your friends and their friends to support it. Think of the free listings in the press and online and get included if you can.

If you do want to have a launch event, it may be just as effective to have it somewhere relevant to the subject of

the book. If it's a book about fire engines, the local fire station might be a good place to consider. If you do want the support of a local bookseller then at least give them the opportunity to sell your book for you on the evening.

## **Caveat no. 2**

There's a bit of a myth that goes on within publishing and bookselling that says the key to a successful book is to pile it high in bookstores. Well, to an extent that's true (the Booker Prize winner wouldn't sell thousands of copies if it wasn't available through supermarkets and bookstores), but there is truly more to it than that. It is about creating demand and as a self-published author that has to be your main aim.

If your book is specialist in nature then there will probably be subject specialist booksellers around the world. Doing a Google search such as 'archaeology book retailers' or 'maritime book retailers' will throw up a list of potential customers world wide. Visit their sites and see how best to make contact with them. Very often all you'll need to do is send your AI and a covering email. Emailing an AI to such outlets (they can be found in the main simply on Google) is a very productive activity. In truth you will find specialist booksellers covering archaeology to yachting and they're usually responsive as it is their business to be.

Finally there are library suppliers in the UK. These are companies that, unsurprisingly, supply libraries. This is all about information flow. They will simply take your AI and send it on to their purchasers. They may or may not order. In the UK public libraries tend to be serviced through Holt Jackson and Askews (owned by the aforementioned Gardners and Bertrams, incidentally), whilst academic libraries source from the likes of Starkmann, Blackwell's and Dawson Books (now owned by WHSmith, which in turn owns Bertrams. Incestuous business, this, you know).

If you're buying into our full marketing package, then we will email your AI to key buyers and keep you in the loop with their responses.

### **Caveat no. 3** (quite a few of these in this wee book)

Most of the UK book trade works on a principle of SOR. This is a ghastly horrible system that ages publishers, turning them grey, mad and dribbly. It stands for sale or return and essentially means that most booksellers will return to you for a full refund any book they have not been able to sell. So, be cautious. If you want bookshops to stock and support you, you have to manage the issue of returns (some general publishers expect back as much as 30% of what they ship, so it's a serious issue). Alternatively, you can ask for cash with order and supply them on a firm sale

basis only but you are likely to lose quite a lot of bookseller interest this way. It's your call and it does depend on the genre of book you've written. As a general rule, if your book falls into the 'impulse buy' category, where the bookseller will stock it speculatively hoping that their customers in turn will buy it, then it's the awful uncertainty of SOR for you, my friend. But if your book is factual in nature, and you're selling to a supplier who has probably presold it to a library or a business, then it's usually acceptable to insist on supplying it on a firm sale basis.

# 6. Marketing

This is all about how you attract people to the book and make them want to part with their hard-earned cash and actually buy a copy. We'll assume you don't have a £25k budget to play with, so what can you do that's cheap and effective?

First think about your target market. At whom, when you first started this mighty work, were you aiming the book? Describe them. Where do they live? How old are they? How can you let them know about your book? Only include target markets that you are confident you can reach. It is important to answer these questions to try to get inside the heads of your potential readers.

Now think about what goals you hope to achieve through the book. It is important that these goals are specific, that they are measurable against existing information, that they are attainable and realistic and finally that they are within a set time-frame. This might include things like 'get into the top 100 books on Amazon about Preston Bus Station within three months of publication' (granted, an unlikely goal unless your book features Preston Bus Station).

Next think about your book and where it fits in the market ('situation analysis' in marketing speak but we don't really do marketing speak here). Begin with a short description of your book. What might be the key to getting to the market? It might be your expertise as the author. It might just be that it's a very entertaining read. Or it might actually be that it is the *only* book on the importance of the vole in ancient Roman religion. Describe in general terms the challenges your book might face. What differentiates your book and what are its competitors? Be honest and do your research – saying it's the only book in its area may not be a killer point even if true.

In a recent survey some 32% of people said they bought a book because they were influenced by reviews in newspapers, magazines and online. A further 20% will buy on the recommendation of family or friends. So how can you make sure people read about your book in the press? You do have to be prepared to be shameless and make a lot of noise to generate any interest. The first place to start is with a professional-looking press release.

### **Creating effective press releases**

We've included a template that will help you produce an effective press release. It should have a story about you and your book, a brief synopsis and a cover image, and



don't forget contact details! It needs to be as punchy and as compelling as possible. And it needs, ultimately, to be flexible. The same message to the local press in your home town is not necessarily going to work if sent to a journalist in the town of your birth. So one size will not necessarily fit all. The core message can remain the same but be prepared to do some gentle manipulation to ensure it resonates with each targeted media.

The main purpose of your release is likely to be one or more of the following:

- To achieve a review of your book;
- To announce yourself as a published author or let people know that you have a new book out;
- To place an article about the subject your book covers, with you as the expert on the subject.

Infinite Authors has an extensive database of journalists both local and national and we'll send your finished release out on your behalf. Speak to us to discuss which sectors it should be sent to so that we can provide a well researched and targeted list of journalists who will want to hear your message.

Timing is important. Newspapers and broadcast media, whether national or local, work to fairly short lead times, maybe a couple of weeks. National magazines, especially the

big consumer titles, work many months in advance, so for example if *Cosmo* or *Red* were going to run a feature on your book in their Christmas edition, they'd need to see a copy or perhaps just proofs if you're lucky sometime in July. That obviously causes you a logistical issue. Do you print advance copies for them alone and delay actual publication by four months? It's tricky – good national coverage is difficult to come by so if you were to get serious interest from a big title you may have to consider launching to suit them. The issue here is that they are highly unlikely to feature a book that has already been out in the market for four months, as they want cutting edge, not yesterday's, news.

You will be funding this activity with physical books and there's a cost attached to that. Some big publishers send out hundreds of review copies to the press (many appear on Amazon as used copies within days of publication but that's another story). Unless you have an unlimited budget, you need to make a call on how many books to send out. Your press release can offer a review copy to be sent separately.

We'd suggest that you only send a physical copy to the most obvious media. So, if it's a novel, then send it with the release to the media local to where you live as well as to any other locations mentioned in the book or pertinent to you as the author. If it's more specialist then send a physical copy to the learned journals or trade magazines only.

An inexpensive way to reach a lot of journalists and bloggers at once is to send your press release as a newswire release through the Press Association. Your release will be delivered directly into the newsrooms of every national and major regional newspaper, and every TV and radio station across the UK and Ireland as well as over 100 government departments. These releases are also seen by thousands of freelance journalists and bloggers. The Press Association is difficult to contact directly so in order to guarantee the distribution of your release you need to contact one of their distribution partners such as PR Newswire ([www.prnewswire.com](http://www.prnewswire.com)), PR Web ([uk.prweb.com](http://uk.prweb.com)), Marketwire ([www.marketwire.com](http://www.marketwire.com)) or Business Wire ([www.businesswire.com](http://www.businesswire.com)).

## **Media coverage**

Books of a specialist nature will usually be reviewed in the academic journals (print and online) and as this is your field you're likely to know which these are. Be aware that reviews through such publications can take a long time (months, if not years) to appear so be patient. Before you send anything make sure that they do indeed review books, then send a press release, initially by email. You can legitimately follow up on this by phone or email if you hear nothing.

Usually local media are the low hanging fruit on the publicity front so do expect to start on BBC West

Peterborough FM and the *Grimsby Fisherman's Herald*. It may sound like slightly depressing activity but it is essential work. You might well prefer a slot on *The One Show* or Andrew Marr, but everyone's chasing that space. Put politely, it's unlikely you'll get national media so think local and appreciate what this can bring you, at least initially. You can always contact Mr Marr's office once you've made a splash locally.

Think about local angles for your book. There's a scene in it set in Preston Bus Station? Well be prepared to discuss your connection with that fine city with the *Lancashire Evening Post*. For a first time author, local is usually a good way of generating coverage simply because everyone - everyone - chases the nationals.

And here's a very simple but terribly important piece of advice when you do get any interview space. Mention the book by title as many times as you possibly can. It may sound obvious but you'd be amazed at how many authors, dazzled by the excitement of being on the 6 am Saturday slot on Radio Rhyl, forget to ram the title of their book down their audience's throat.

In addition there are some very good self-publishing and creative writing magazines out there that may be interested

in reviewing your book and we'd recommend you send them a physical copy as well as the release. Similarly, the organ of the book trade (their description not ours), the *Bookseller*, does review forthcoming books but usually several months in advance (as it is aimed at bookshop buyers planning their stock). The *Bookseller* also runs advertising-led supplements on specific subjects.

### **Putting yourself about a bit**

We've discussed a book launch at your local bookshop or fire station, but there are some other physical events you can think about too. If you've written a children's book, might the local school be prepared to let you come in and do a reading? It's a great way of getting your work out there in front of your core audience. You will obviously have to liaise with the school itself to arrange this for reasons of security.

If you've written a business book, might the local Chamber of Commerce be interested in an event at which you talk (and sell your book, of course!)? What about your local library (assuming it's not been closed down and sold to Starbucks as a result of government spending cuts). Could you do a reading there?

## **Social networking and digital media**

Are you on Facebook or Twitter? If so start promoting your book a few months prior to publication. If not, set up a page for your book or yourself on Facebook and encourage as many people as possible to become fans. It is easy to do (trust us, even we managed) and even if you have never managed to get to grips with all that internet nonsense your kids or younger friends should be able to help you attract some numbers.

Create a web page too and think what should go up there. Excerpts? Or perhaps the whole book? It may sound counter intuitive to give away something that is meant to generate revenue but there's a huge amount of evidence to suggest that free e-content stimulates hard copy sales.

Consider blogs and blogging. If your book is about a specialist subject, say tuning nineteenth-century Latvian pianos or, yes, voles and Vestal Virgins, there will probably be blogs on these subjects. Register and blog about your book. If one doesn't exist yet set it up.

Lastly think about how you can use Amazon. You can register as the author and make comments to support your book page. What you can't do of course is manipulate the Customer Reviews section by encouraging everyone you know to register

and post fabulous reviews thus giving you a five star rating. Why not? Well, it's simply not right, is it? No self-respecting publisher or author would ever demean themselves by such chicanery. Ever ... There are other powerful online retailers out there too. Check out [www.thebookdepository.com](http://www.thebookdepository.com) and [www.play.com](http://www.play.com) to name just two.

### **The seal of approval**

Endorsements, although now arguably overused, can still be very powerful especially for a first time novelist who has no profile with readers. Do you know anyone vaguely famous whose name may resonate with journalists (and readers, obviously)? If the answer is yes to this question ask for a quote and splash that quote all over the book jacket (with the celeb's agreement of course). If you're an academic, what about peer reviews - they can be very powerful (if positive, of course!).

### **Selling direct**

If you're lucky enough to be able to get to consumers directly (for example through social networking, book events and your web site) that's great. You just need to decide what you want to do about discount for bulk copies, how to charge for postage and packing and also of course how you take payment. Use the price the book appears

at on Amazon as a benchmark. Offer to personalise the book by signing it, too. Readers really do value that (and remember first editions of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* sell for thousands signed or unsigned).

You could consider making contact directly with potential consumers by email or telemarketing. If you're a novelist or poet it's pretty hard, nay impossible, to identify potentially interested parties in this way. But if you've written a business or a local history book, then you can research potentially interested parties and try them direct. Telesales is not for the faint hearted but email addresses can be easy to access and this can prove a successful approach. Nothing ventured, nothing gained!

Cash or cheque with order still just about works but you may want to think about a secure online payment system such as PayPal ([www.paypal.com](http://www.paypal.com)). That is very easy to set up and has the advantage of being very secure.

## **Book prizes and literary festivals**

Do some research regarding prizes and festivals. Are there any book prizes you can submit your work to? It's probably best to look for smaller specialist prizes and leave the Booker to Mr Jacobson *et al*. But there are plenty of other competitions out there so you should research them.



Simply Google 'literary prizes' or 'literary awards' and you'll get details on competitions, large and small, to enter.

There are several subject-specific prizes, for example in business, travel and medicine, and the beauty of the smaller prizes is that they are probably more open to the idea of a self-published book winning or at least being properly considered. A quick trawl through Google will flag the competitions you should consider going for.

You don't have to aim for Edinburgh or Cheltenham when considering a festival. There are now lots of smaller local ones – phone the organiser and offer yourself up to do a reading and to talk about the joys of self-publishing.

## **Advertising**

Advertising in the national press is horribly expensive and usually costs more than it delivers in sales so unless you have a few thousand quid burning a hole in your pocket we'd advise against it. Specialist or local press for a specialist or local-interest book can work, however, and remember, classified adverts are relatively cheap and for the right book (usually non fiction) can be effective

Think too about advertising your book with banner ads on appropriate web sites. This will work better for a specialist

book as you'll be able to link the subject to Google search terms.

To summarise, if you're serious about promoting your book you have to put the work in. People in the main will not find you, you need to find them. Work hard, explore every avenue, always carry a copy of your book with you, or at least an attractively designed information sheet about it (you just never know who you'll bump into who can help) and never turn down an opportunity to promote your work.

## 7. Literary agents

Increasingly authors use self-publishing to attract the attention of literary agents who they hope will ultimately secure them a publishing deal with a mainstream house. It can prove an effective tactic.

A literary agent should act as your mentor, friend and trusted partner looking after every aspect of the commercial and (if you're lucky) emotional business of being an author. A pretty full list of agents features in that fine tome *The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook*.

It's possible that your beautifully published book alone will persuade an agent to sign you up and kick-start your lifelong relationship with HarperCollins. It's possible but unlikely. We'd advise that you contact agents a few months after you've published your book when you can wow them with sales figures, media coverage and endorsements from adoring readers throughout the land.

There's a lot of evidence from the US that mainstream houses are looking to sign successful self-published writers. The key word is 'successful' – achieve that initial success and finding the right agent will follow.

## 8. Foreign language sales

This kind of falls into a similar category to literary agents. Initially, as an unknown self-published writer it's unlikely that spending time researching and then contacting a large number of foreign publishers is going to be fruitful. Foreign language publishers look to buy rights to books that are already proven successes. Make the domestic sales and then your foreign rights agent will be much better able to help you to sell internationally. Alternatively you can go it alone by contacting publishers directly. If you do go down that route the website for the Frankfurt Book Fair is a very good place to start as you can search publishers by country and subject area and in a lot of cases make contact direct. (But the truth is you're more likely to be successful abroad if you have a good agent representing you.)

# 9. Checklist

We're going to finish the guide with what we hope is a handy marketing checklist. Let us know if it helps. Good luck!

## **The package**

- Sixteen per cent of people buy a book on the basis of the appeal of the cover alone, so work hard to ensure yours works. Look at comparable and successful books in the market and think what has been done well through the overall design. Don't copy, learn. And remember, if your book needs an illustrated jacket, don't be tempted to try to cobble one together yourself unless you're a trained designer. Pay for something that looks professional.
- Remember, you're a publisher and an author. So think about the name of the publishing company you're starting. You can use your own name of course, but it's probably better to think of something that suggests you're a publisher first and an author second. So think of something that relates to the subject you're writing about.
- Ensure that the design, price and format for your book are appropriate. Again a little research on Amazon can and will go a long way.

- Use the design elements throughout all your marketing, from the press release through to the marketing material and advertising.

## **Pre-publication promotion**

- Make your AI powerful, well designed and persuasive.
- Get the AI out early. Wholesalers and bookshops will all need to be informed about the title several months in advance.
- Create a buzz. Talk up your book, tell people about it, show them the AI and be as excited about it as possible. Excitement is infectious!
- Consider advertising with wholesalers if you have budget to spare and your book needs broader bookshop support.
- Using the tools we've supplied, create good marketing material and sales collateral. The more professional you look, the more you will be taken seriously by everyone, the book trade included.

## **PR**

- Hook the media from the outset. Have an interesting headline and make the copy stand out. These days journalists will take about 15 seconds to look at a release so you have to engage with them quickly.

- Work painstakingly on your author biography until it is interesting (assuming it isn't already). Make sure that it tells the reader a story as well as expressing your subject expertise.
- Get quotes and endorsements for your book if at all possible.
- When targeting the media, don't focus exclusively on the mainstream media. Most of the time small pieces in the papers are better than bigger pieces. Sometimes big pieces of coverage give away too much information and give readers too many reasons not to buy a book.
- If you can possibly afford it consider hiring a professional PR to help you. Most publicity is built on relationships with the press and sometimes you need to buy somebody's time to access those relationships.
- Consider presswire releases, which are an effective way to announce a new publication to a large audience of journalists and bloggers.
- Don't be sniffy about the local press. The chances are it's the only attention you'll receive initially so if the local radio wants you on the 5.30 morning slot then go and do it with good grace.

## Web

- Buy a domain name and create a simple but well designed website or blog. Add extras like audio downloads, competitions, extracts and reviews if you have any.
- Submit your URL to the search engines and consider search engine optimisation techniques. Select key words and make sure that they are embedded in your meta tags. You may need to ask someone under 30 what this means or buy a copy of *Get into Bed with Google* (published by Infinite Ideas, incidentally).
- Use social networking tools (Facebook etc.) to help your web site or blog throughout online communities.
- Remember that online marketing takes time. A long tail approach requires patience, consistency and persistence.
- Consider cross-promotional opportunities including affiliate links, content sharing and RSS feeds (better ask a 16-year-old about this part).
- Use media such as YouTube. You can upload a video describing your book for nothing.
- Participate in discussion boards and blogs.
- Consider promotional freebies. Give free PDF versions of your book to review websites and bloggers.



## Events

- Make friends with your local bookshop as soon as possible. Do they have an events coordinator? Ask to make an appointment to visit and present your book-signing ideas.
- Contact your local library for reading opportunities.
- Visit stores and offer to sign their stock of your book.
- Contact the literary festivals and prizes. There are hundreds of literary festivals and prizes, both national and local, some big some small. Give them a go!

# Conclusion

We hope the tips and techniques we've outlined above will help you launch your self-published books successfully. Remember, if you'd like help and guidance there's always someone knowledgeable to talk to at the end of the phone, if you call +44 (0)1865 517281.

Finally, don't think of marketing activity as something that stops as soon as your book is published. You have to keep working at promoting the book. Keep putting yourself up for readings and events. Be constantly active and creative. If you can tie in your book to an event that happens six months after publication, release another press release offering yourself as an expert on the subject.

Keep pushing, keep being enthusiastic and believe constantly in your own ability. Only by such hard work and belief will you be successful.

Good luck and congratulations on your bestseller-to-be.

**The boys and girls of Infinite Authors**

# Glossary of marketing terms

## **advertising**

Advertising is the form of communication that attempts to persuade consumers to take some action, in this case buying a book. It's most often used in a business-to-business context, in other words selling a new title into retailers. In publishing consumer advertising is most often used to announce or support a new book from an established brand or author.

## **AI (or ATI)**

Advanced Information or Advanced Title Information sheets are lovingly prepared by marketing departments throughout publishing and used to alert representatives and booksellers to the glories of each new title. Traditionally they contain sales blurb, a jacket image, full

bibliographic details, and the core of a marketing plan. So if you produce one and it looks professional, the booksellers are more likely to assume you know what you're doing and support you accordingly.

**blurb**

The description of the book on its back panel, also called cover copy.

**book fairs**

Nowadays mainly rights fairs where publishers gather to buy and sell foreign language (and other) rights. The main fairs are in the UK in April, the US in May and Germany (the infamous Frankfurt Book Fair) in October.

**design, cover**

People say we shouldn't judge a book by its cover but of course we do. As the first thing a customer will see, it's important to get the cover just right.

**distribution**

The process whereby a book ends up in the hot sweaty hands (or on the screen) of a reader. Each publisher has their distributor listed on a bibliographic system and

orders sent from booksellers are usually automatically routed to that distributor. You as a self-publisher need to give address details through Nielsen so that people can order your book if so inclined. Ebooks are distributed through digital aggregators in case you're interested.

**endorsements**

A book endorsement is the declaration by a well-known individual of their personal support for a book or author. Usually it is people seen to be key influencers for a book's audience who are chosen to provide endorsements. These endorsements commonly appear on the jackets of books.

**ISBN**

International Standard Book Number. This is the number on the back of the book, usually incorporated into the bar code, which identifies a particular edition of any book. So the paperback and hardback editions of the same title will have different ISBNs. ISBNs

allow customers and retailers to identify (and therefore buy) a book anywhere in the world. ISBNs recently moved from 10 digits to 13 digits causing a kind of drunken hysteria within publishing production departments.

**literary agent**

Hard to describe. Even harder to talk to. Lovely people though. They are all located in Fulham.

**marketing**

The process by which publishing companies identify target markets and then deliver the proper communication so that these markets respond - hopefully by buying the book. Elements that fall within the marketing mix include the tangible features of a book (size, price, jacket copy, etc), as well as distribution and promotional activity such as advertising and PR.

**marketing, co-op**

When a bookshop promotes a book or series of books by piling it high front of store or in the window, this is the result of co-op marketing.

The publisher pays for the privilege which does bring into question the accuracy of the term 'co-op'.

**newswire release**

Also known as a presswire release, this is an electronic wire service that transmits up-to-the-minute news, usually in the form of a press release, to the media, bloggers and often the general public. This can be a very cost-effective way of getting people talking about a new book.

**platform, marketing**

This is about anything special you can do to promote your book. Who do you know in the media who will help promote your book? Do you have regular speaking engagements or other public activities? What's your personal history? Do you know anyone famous who will write a foreword? Do you have a network of contacts that you can sell to?

**PR**

Public relations or publicity; a deliberate attempt to manage the public perception of a subject. PR is an important component in

marketing a book because of its relatively low cost, the credibility that is created by a favourable comment from the media and the fact that the right piece of coverage, say through a national newspaper, will be read by millions. The disadvantage of PR is lack of control: what happens if the journo hates your book?

**press release**

A statement for distribution to the media, describing a new book. A press release is used to gain publicity for a book by providing journalists with information that is useful, newsworthy and accurate.

**publicist**

A marketing professional whose job is to generate and manage publicity (PR) for a book

**rights**

As you're self-publishing, you own all the rights in your book. If you were publishing through the traditional route, your publisher would usually require you to sign over to them all the rights in your



book. This means that they can sell it to third parties such as newspapers (serialisation rights) and publishers overseas (foreign language rights).

**sale or return (SOR)** Most of the industry works on the basis that if a book is sold into a bookshop then that bookshop has the right to return that book during an agreed period, usually no sooner than 3 months after publication, and no later than 15 months. This means that an author and a publisher see the world in different ways. Author walks into a bookshop and sees a pile of their books and thinks, 'Great'. Publisher walks in and thinks 'Shit we'll be getting that lot back next week'. You're a publisher now. Draw your own conclusions.

