
The OTHER Social Medium: Boost Business and **Attract Targeted Traffic With Amazon Book Reviews**



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The strategies presented here are based on Cathy Goodwin's own experience. No claims or promises are made with regard to results or earnings.

Introduction: Why You Need This Report

Many professional service businesses face unique challenges in the 21st century. For example:

Getting more clients online.

These days more and more people are hiring professional services based on what they learn online. If your business is virtual, you probably attract clients from all over the world. They value your credentials and skills more than they value the opportunity to meet you in person. They would rather hire the best resource who can help than limit themselves to a geographic region.

Anyway, who has time for live networking: rubber chicken lunches, hand-shaking and giving talks to small groups? These days it's getting harder to find places to speak. Parking, driving, even dry cleaning ... your expenses keep going up, yet you don't always earn back your investment when you attend live meetings.

Attracting targeted clients. Most independent professionals and service business owners maintain a description of an Ideal Client. You probably work best with clients of a certain age, gender, or occupation. When I worked with career change clients (and I still do occasionally), I found a niche among people who had advanced degrees and/or owned businesses.

Therefore, you need a way to reach clients who are seeking the kinds of solutions that you provide. Traditional marketing segmentation strategies focus on demographics, such as age or gender, or psychographics, such as interests and lifestyle. These variables help us understand our clients

but ultimately they hire us because they have a tough problem they need to solve, often urgently.

Reaching clients who don't search on the Internet.

Some people just don't consider the Internet, especially for certain problems. Many career changers, for instance, begin their information search in bookstores and classified ads. They don't get online and google "career coaches for professionals and executives."

Here we can use the analogy of the billboard versus the yellow pages. When you drive by a billboard, you get a message even if you are not looking for one. For instance, suppose you just broke up with a partner. You hadn't thought of joining a dating service but now you see an advertisement. You get an idea to use a service that you hadn't considered earlier...maybe a service you hadn't even know about.

When you face this type of target market, you need to get in front of the crowd. Maybe they are not looking for a career coach or an organizer. Once they see your review of a book on career change or on organizing, they decide to investigate further.

Communicating your value. These days it's not always easy to explain what you do. Growing up, you didn't have life coaches, career coaches, organizers, healers and ADHD experts. Even traditional services (such as lawyers and financial planners) do not deliver services the same way they did 20 or even 10 years ago. "This is not your father's service provider."

When you go to live meetings, you get to share your 11-second elevator speech with half a dozen people (if you're lucky). You don't have time to explain who you are, let alone showcase your expertise. When you write a book review, you can demonstrate your knowledge. immigration lawyer.

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<http://www.BoostBusinessWithBookReviews.com>

Establishing credibility. Clients need to see you as “the expert.” To demonstrate your knowledge calls for more than an 11-second elevator speech. Your credibility comes from your credentials, but also from your experience.

A review gives you space to communicate what you know. You’ve got up to 1000 words, although 300-600 words will be more likely to draw readers. You’ve got time for several paragraphs, not just a few sentences of an elevator speech.

Communicating personality. These days clients want to see you as a three-dimensional person. Sometimes they hire you when they hear you have a dog, went to college in the Midwest or follow the Steelers during football season. They want to know how you decided to enter this profession and whether you bring first-hand, personal experience to your practice.

But you can’t use too much detail on your “About Me” page or you’ll send readers running for cover. Anyway, not all your readers want to know *all* about you. By reviewing books on different topics – music, art, sports, and fiction – you get to showcase different components of your own personality.

Referrals are good, but...

You *will* get clients through referrals. But these days, when you offer a service that’s new to many people, you face a challenge. Your clients may not know anyone in their circle of friends who is familiar with your services, let alone who know that you provide the services.

Just recently I was chatting with a neighbor who was having trouble finding a new career. In the 21st century, this corporate executive was barely aware that career coaches existed, let alone that she could find a coach who specialized

in her particular career field. Yet she had visited Amazon to find books on career change and life transition.

You can hold teleseminars and create information products. These techniques can be extremely effective and I use them myself. Yet many professionals find their target markets aren't looking on the Internet. Sometimes they aren't looking at all. For example, members of my first target market – midlife professionals who want to change careers – rarely search google for help.

How to reach prospects who are not looking for you: Using book reviews to promote your services

My first site was about career change and relocation. I faced all these challenges when searching for prospects. To enhance my own knowledge, and find resources to recommend to my clients, I devoured books on life transition and careers.

I read a lot of other books, too: mysteries, memoir and psychology. Because I was working alone as a solo-preneur, I didn't have colleagues. I didn't know a lot of people who were interested in what I was reading. So just for fun, I began writing reviews for Amazon. I wanted to share my views with the world.

Was this marketing? It sure didn't feel like marketing. No way. In fact, I felt guilty every time I posted a review. Surely, I thought, I could be doing something more useful.

To my surprise, readers started calling me. They had read my reviews. Then they went to my website. Or they just googled my name. One Amazon-referred client hired me on the spot for a \$1500 program, after a single get-acquainted call.

What was happening?

As a marketer (and a published author myself), I wanted to understand what was happening. I eventually figured out why the system was working for me (and why many people were not getting good results from *their* reviews). Here is how Amazon meets the challenges we listed earlier.

Reviews reach LOTS of people.

Amazon gets a ton of traffic. You just need a fraction of those millions to be profitable and successful. Your Amazon reviews introduce you to all sorts of people who are looking online for solutions to problems. They're not always the same people who go into search engines, but they definitely know how to activate a browser and get into the Internet.

Reviews reach buyers, not tire-kickers or freebie-seekers.

When people come to Amazon, they hold credit cards in their hands. They know: nothing is free here. If you want a book, you have to buy. Therefore, they have the same mindset when they look you up.

Reviews let you reach TARGETED clients.

You can choose books that your prospects are considering to solve very specific problems. These days it's easier than ever before. With a saturated market, publishers increasingly insist that authors focus on a fairly narrow readership.

➔ Do you work with parents of troubled teen girls?

You can bet they're reading books about teen girls. *Troubled* teen girls. They are not reading general books on parenting. You can easily find and review books about teenagers and

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even books about teen girls. You can even find books about teens with specific kinds of troubles: eating disorders, bullying, image issues and more.

Depending on your field, you may want to review books on a variety of topics or you may choose to narrow your scope. You may even want to review fiction and memoir books related to your topic. For instance, a career coach can draw material from memoirs that traced an author's career.

Reviews reach prospects who are not looking for you.

A surprising number of Amazon shoppers restrict their Internet usage. They don't live on the Internet. At the first hint of a problem, they don't rush to their computers and google for a solution. They're looking for something tangible, such as a book they can hold in their hands. They are not necessarily looking for coaches, consultants or other sources of live human help.

Once they've started reading your review, they might get curious about the person behind the review. They look up your profile and see the URL for your website. They click over to learn more about you.

I've attracted clients who never expected to hire a career consultant or coach. They just started surfing, got curious and one thing led to another. Not everyone will experience the same results I did, but you can be open to the possibilities.

Reviews let you communicate your value.

Your reviews allow you a wide scope to talk about yourself, as long as you follow the guidelines we will discuss later. Most important, you have a lot more than 11 seconds – the elevator speech limit – to talk about your work.

Most important, **you can communicate a lot more information** than you could during even a 30-minute presentation to a live audience. You can review half a dozen or more books, on your topic as well as your interests and passions outside work.

Reviews let you showcase your personality.

Readers who scroll through all your reviews will get a solid three-dimensional view of you. They'll find out as much or as little as you disclose by your choice of books to read and review. If you have a spiritual orientation, you can review books about your own form of spirituality. If you are an avid dog or cat person, you can review books like *Art of Racing in the Rain* and *Homer's Odyssey*.

Reviews motivate readers to take action immediately.

Most likely your review will probably be read more carefully than most website content. Here's why. Readers of your reviews are thinking about buying a book or perhaps borrowing the book from their libraries. They will be making a decision based on the information you provide, even though the dollar amount of the decision is probably less than \$30.

Psychologists say that we pay more attention to information (and remember more) when we anticipate needing this information to make a decision. Now you've got readers who are trying to decide, "Should I buy this book?" So they will read reviews more carefully than they might read articles.

Reviews help authors sell books.

If you're an author, you need to **get in front of readers**, preferably readers who are interested in **exactly the same kind of book you wrote**. These days fewer authors are making the rounds of live bookstores. Publishers are

reluctant to pay their expenses and frankly, it's no longer fun for authors. Planes are crowded and hotels are impersonal.

When you review other people's books, you promote yourself, too. Readers click on your name and discover you're an author. You refer to your own books in your review, if they're not coming on their own. And you'll learn some tips about getting your own book reviewed, too.

How Reviews Are Different From Writing Articles.

Article marketing is a terrific way to get known around the Internet. Definitely make article marketing an important element of your promotion. If you aren't familiar with this system, here's the way it works:

You write articles – 300 – 800 words. You send them to ezine directories. Maybe you've written articles. So you offer FREE articles for FREE content in FREE directories. Your name gets around. Your search engine position ranking improves. When you get placed on prestigious sites, your credibility skyrockets.



I am not an expert on article marketing. Currently I am referring readers to the Article Marketing Expert Eric Gruber. He has free templates at <http://bit.ly/templatesfree> and lots more when you click over there.

Alas, all too often, articles end up on FREE websites or FREE ezines. And what do readers expect? You're right: More FREE stuff!

So, while I recommend an ongoing investment in article marketing, I have learned that Amazon readers bring a unique perspective to your services. They are reading your

review with one hand on the mouse and the other hand holding a credit card. They know: if they want to get anything from Amazon, they must be prepared to spend real money.

This Report has 3 parts.

First, you will learn about the basics: how Amazon reviews are written.

Next, you'll get some specific tips to write your review: what books to choose and how to use your commentary to promote your services, ethically and persuasively.

Finally, you'll get ideas for ways to use reviews to attract traffic and grow your business online.

Onward...!



I. The Basics of Amazon and Reviews

I will focus on the Amazon community because it's the best known of the online bookstores. You may find good results with B&N and other online review centers, such as goodreads.com.

But Amazon has become the Gold Standard. Consultants promise to help authors who want to achieve Number One Amazon Best Seller. They don't say Number One Barnes & Noble seller.

Amazon reviews are powerful.

Blogger Steve Weber targets authors with his blog "Plug Your Book." He advises authors that Amazon reviews will increase sales not just on Amazon, but everywhere. Go here to see the full blog post:

<http://tinyurl.com/cmX6df>

Read what the Midwest Book Review Association said on this website: <http://tinyurl.com/cvaxmp>

A review posted on the Amazon.com web site will reach a larger audience than one printed, published or posted on any other newspaper, periodical, publication, or web site. As one of their most prolific content providers, the Midwest Book Review has been posting reviews on Amazon.com for many, many years.

"Follow the money..."

You can tell Amazon has power because publishers now send review copies to specific reviewers. Additionally, some authors actually pay to get their reviews on Amazon.

Writing for *Slate* magazine, author Garth Risk Hallberg reveals that his own book was not reviewed by accident. His

publicist had sent a copy of the book to Grady Harp, a prolific reviewer. You can read the story here:
<http://www.slate.com/id/2182002/pagenum/all/>

One manufacturing company offered to pay people to write positive Amazon reviews. They just paid sixty-five cents for each review, but it's significant that they recognized the power of a negative review. <http://tinyurl.com/7y9lt5>

Amazon is a community.

Besides being a Gold Standard for reviews, the Amazon community is first and foremost a community. Before writing a single review, consider what that means.

You have to join the community. You become a member by making at least one book purchase. And you are expected to contribute as a community member, not a marketer. You're sharing ideas with friends, not selling yourself or your services.

You have to respect other members of the community. Your reviews will be flagged when you are too negative about another book or reviewer. I also find an unwritten rule: tiptoe around sensitive topics.

The community polices itself. Every so often the question arises, "Do I have to read the whole book to write a review?" My answer is, "You have to read as much as you need to be credible." If you try to fake your knowledge, you will probably be exposed.

For instance, if you say, "The author does not cover this point..." You may get a stinging comment, "Yes he does. Look at page 136."

Now you've lost credibility and you may be embarrassed....unless you go to page 136 and find the comment is wrong, not you.

If you're an author, you need to be aware that errors in your book will be heralded in reviews, most of the time. That's the topic for another book.

You can't write reviews on advance copies of books. I have tried to publish reviews of books I received three or four months before publication. These reviews were rejected politely. Unless everyone on Amazon has access to a book, no one has access.

The site within the site: Amazon Vine

Amazon recently departed from its purely egalitarian tradition by creating the Vine Program. You can't join Vine. You have to be invited. (I love that idea!) You get invited if you're a consistent reviewer.



As a Vine member, I get access to a monthly ezine listing books available for review. I can choose up to three books, which are sent to me directly. Some arrive as review copies, others as published books.

Once Amazon offered cases of cat food as well as books. My two spoiled cats enjoyed high quality chicken dinners, packaged in small cans. One cat loved the food; the other turned up her nose and walked off. So as of this writing, I am not sure what to say.

➔ **Tip:** When you see a reviewer identified as a "Vine Voice," you know that reviewer's quality has been recognized. Visit the reviewer's other reviews to get some guidelines to write your own review.

Reviewers take their community responsibilities seriously.

One blogger discovered a book that got a surprising number of 2-star reviews. The author of the book apparently is a popular sports writer. He wrote a book about living through his son's senior year as a baseball player and aspiring college student.

You can read the story here: <http://tinyurl.com/d2hl78>

Apparently the author's daughter felt sorry for her dad's bad reviews. She sent a message to their friends, asking everyone to please write a nice review.

The ploy backfired. Reviewers still wrote bad reviews! The community recognized what was happening and the author was embarrassed.

Step-By-Step to Writing Your Review: Overview

- (1) Make sure you have purchased something from Amazon.
- (2) Choose a book that best meets your strategy.
- (3) Write a review in a text format (such as Notepad for the PC or TextWrangler for the Mac).
- (4) Check the Amazon guidelines.
- (5) Go to the book's entry on Amazon. Look for a button saying, "Create your own review." Usually it will be somewhere on the right, in the section where you read other people's reviews. Paste your review into the space provided.

- (6) Create a title for the review.
- (7) Assign stars to the book. s
- (8) Click “submit.” You’ll be warned if you forgot a step.
- (9) You will see a screen inviting you to preview your review. Take a last long look.
- (10) Click on “Submit” again. Your review may take awhile to appear.

We will go through these steps in detail, but first, let’s see what an Amazon review looks like – from a reviewer’s perspective.

Walk through a review.

Go to <http://www.amazon.com>

Search for Po Bronson's book, *What Should I Do With My Life*.

Scroll past editorial reviews and buying info. When you get to the customer reviews, you'll see a bar chart, showing how reviewers rated the book.

Look for my review. I have both "helpful" and "not helpful" votes. For some reason, this review attracted large numbers of "helpful" votes.

Under my name, you'll see "Amazon 500 Reviewer" and "Vine Voice."

The designation "Amazon 500 Reviewer" is called a "badge." Amazon automatically adds this badge when you become an Amazon 1000 reviewer.

Note that I'm not the only "Amazon 500" reviewer. Everyone who has the same number of net votes – adding the "helpful" and subtracting "not helpful" – gets assigned to the same level.

You will also see that I use my real name and I'm a "Vine Voice." I'll explain later.

Click on "See all my reviews" to the right of my name. You'll be taken to my Amazon review page. You can read all my reviews.

Now you see another reason authors might want high-ranked reviewers to review their books. When readers search through all my reviews, they might stumble across a title they would like to buy.

Now look on the left. You will see my profile and more info about my rankings. I don't know what my overall rank will be the day you look.



Step 1: Make sure you have made a purchase at Amazon with the correct email address.

The only requirement for reviewing is making a purchase at Amazon. As far as I know, just one purchase is enough. If you made the purchase with a different email account, you may inadvertently have created two accounts. If the system denies you access on the grounds that you didn't meet this requirement, that's probably what happened.

Step 2: Choose books to review in line with your strategy.



Target books your audience will be reading.

As you go through Amazon, look up books related to the service you provide. For example, if you are a trust and estates lawyer, you might look up books on

- Aging and any aspects of growing old
- Retirement
- Self-help books on writing wills
- Financial planning
- Health insurance and long term care insurance

Self-help books would be your best bet. To round out your selection you might also read and comment on novels, if you genuinely enjoy reading novels. For instance, Sue Grafton's mystery *T is for Trespass* featured an elderly person who was suffering from an evil hired caregiver. A memoir, *The Kids Will Be All Right*, could be viewed as a cautionary tale for parents who haven't figured out who would care for the children if they were killed in accidents.

For my career market, I targeted career books. I also targeted books on life transition and life satisfaction. I spent

more time on book reviews in these areas because I knew readers might also be prospects.

I have found more success with career books than with books about Internet marketing. That's probably because people look for career books on Amazon but they look online for Internet marketing books. It's also because I haven't reviewed that many books on Internet marketing, although I'm starting to do this. Career readers were especially valuable because they wouldn't find me any other way.

Target newer books.

Readers pay most attention to reviews when a book is new. I've had some excellent response to older books, including calls from prospective clients. But you increase the odds when you focused on the newer books.

Watch for new books that will probably be "hot."

When Malcolm Gladwell writes a book, you know readers will rush to buy it. If his topics fit your niche, you can keep an eye on publishing reports. Make a point of reading this book early as it rises on the best seller list.

The ideal book to review is a new book that grows to best seller status. A few ways to stay on top:



Keep an eye on your favorite authors and be ready when they publish their next books. Most of these authors have websites where they announce their forthcoming books.



Browse through Borders, Barnes & Noble and large independent bookstores in your city (such as Elliott Bay

Books in Seattle, Powell's Books in Denver or Tattered Cover Book Store in Denver). What books are they displaying on their front tables? Do any of those books target your niche?



Listen to NPR and CSPAN shows that feature controversial and popular authors. Pay attention to announcements of author readings in your library and nearby bookstores.

Often you can get advance announcements of these events, which can be signals. Publishers pay for authors to tour when they expect to reap the rewards. When publishers pay for book tours, you might consider investing your own time in book reviews.

Ideally, you can read books and review them before the authors appear. In that way you reach your audience in the early stages, when they're most likely to be reading reviews.

How NOT To Choose A Book For Review

Sometimes a friend, family member or business associate will ask you for a book review. Once I even saw a post on a forum for authors: "I'm looking for a glowing book review..."

I recommend saying "No, thanks." At the very least, you can say, "I will be happy to take a look at your book. I hope I like it. If I don't, I can either write an honest review or do nothing. Which would you prefer?"

Puff-piece reviews destroy your credibility and do nothing for the author. Other reviewers will figure out what's going on and you'll be attacked in comments and even other reviews. Not worth it!

Step 3: Write a review in a text file, such as NotePad or TextWrangler.

Keep a copy of your review on your own computer until you see it appear...and maybe afterward. Reviews can disappear. I suspect some of my reviews were omitted due to some sort of processing error, not censorship. And every so often my computer will hiccup just after I finished a long review but before I clicked "submit." I've had the most glitches when I decided to re-edit before submitting.

That's why it's a good idea to keep a copy of your review so you won't have to start over if your review disappears. It's also a good idea in case you want to submit your reviews as ezine articles.

Step 4: Check and follow the Amazon Guidelines.

Here is a summary of the site's most important guidelines, in my own words. However, be aware that policies change. I am not an official representative of Amazon. These policies seem to make the biggest difference to reviewers.

➤ **Amazon recommends 75-300 words, with a maximum of 1000.**

But in practice, longer reviews can get more attention. I suggest aiming for 300-600 words or more if the book seems to be interesting to your target market.

➤ **Your review must stay focused on the book.**

If you digress from the book, Amazon will cut out the irrelevant parts or kill the review altogether. So when I go off on tangents, I take care to say something like, "The author of the book says X, but I disagree...." Relate everything to the book. Once I didn't and Amazon removed

the paragraphs they considered irrelevant. I didn't take it personally.

It seems okay to refer readers to other books on Amazon. You can say, "Compared to Book X, this book is..."

✚ **Watch your language.**

No 4-letter words and you can't be too nasty. But if you're trying to promote your visibility with book reviews, you will want to be professional anyway.

It's easy to get into trouble, though. When I reviewed Bella DePaolo's excellent book *Singled Out*, I quoted the author's argument: If you're single and (shall we say) "active," you're a slut. She used the word "slut" and I quoted her.

I kept waiting for the review to appear. I submitted the review two or three times. No luck. Finally I figured out I was inadvertently using a 4-letter word.

Hey – it's a quote – the author's word, not mine. Bella DePaolo is hardly a pornographer. She's a respected academic sociologist.

But apparently Amazon doesn't care. And they've got a point. As with movie previews, a reader of reviews might not have the same sensibilities as the reader of the book.

Step 5: Paste your draft review into the Amazon site.

Go to the book's entry on Amazon. Look for a button saying, "Create your own review." Usually it will be somewhere on the right, in the section where you read other people's reviews.

Paste your review into the site. If you are using a text file, your review should look just fine. You can't use HTML code so you can't add bold type or color to your reviews.

Step 6: Create a simple headline for your review.

Headlines should summarize your opinion about the book. You don't need to catch the reader's attention. He's already on the page. "Good but flawed" is one I've used.

Some reviewers (including me) like to play on the book's headline. So for a review of Lisa Scott line's *Killer Smile*, I named the review, "A Smile on the Face of This Reader."

For Marcia Muller's *Burnout*, I created a title to say the author was not burned out. Most readers coming to this page would know Marcia Muller, who's been around a long time with a long list of book credits. Many authors grow stale after a long series, but Muller hasn't. So "not burned out" is more than a play on words. It's a positive comment.

Step 7: Rate the book with 1 to 5 stars.

In my experience, assigning a rating is the most difficult part of reviewing. Other reviewers apparently feel the same way, as you'll see reviewers saying, "I wish I could assign 3.5 stars."

It's difficult because...well, sometimes a book will have a great plot but weak characters. Or sometimes a book is really good but not knock-your-socks off.

And it's *really* difficult if you've had any communication with the author. Even if the author is a stranger, it's hard to get a note saying, "I'm sorry you didn't like my book."

Every author wants a 5-star review. Even if you write glowingly about the book, they'll see 4 stars and think

you've cheated them. I once actually got an email from a disgruntled author who complained about her 4-star rating. Sad, but true.

Then there are the other readers and reviewers. Give a 3-star or 2-star rating to a cult author and you'll draw nasty comments and snide remarks in other reviews.

A rating of 3 stars or below makes a statement. I'm reminded of my days as a college professor. Everybody wants an A. Most students will tolerate an occasional B (although some will retaliate with nasty comments on your evaluations). But give a C and they'll march into the Dean's office asking for your head on a platter.

These days I try to be mellower. I try to keep reviews at 4 or 5 stars.

Last year I reviewed Natalie Goldberg's book on memoir writing, *Old Friend From Far Away*. I had heard the author speak in Seattle and I'm a long-time fan of hers. I even bought a few autographed copies of her book.

If you read my review you'll see I assigned 4 stars. And you'll also see a comment where a reader wondered why I had assigned fewer stars. Well, she *is* Natalie Goldberg. I don't always like her but I always respect her. And I really loved *Thunder and Lightning*.

There's always a critic...and someone to criticize the critic.

Step 8: Click "submit." You'll be warned if you forgot to do something, such as assign stars to the book.

Step 9: You will see a screen inviting you to "Preview Your Review." Take a last, long look.

When you discover errors after you've submitted your book, there is no problem...except that you lose the "helpful" votes. Of course, you don't know how many prospects saw the errors also.

Step 10. Click on "Submit." That's all there is to it. You're done.

Your review usually appears right away but sometimes can take awhile. Nobody's really sure why some reviews are delayed and why some never appear, except for obvious violation of the guidelines.

But you're not finished yet.

After Your Review is Published

Amazon now allows readers to comment on your reviews, presumably to create a sense of community. While commenting on blogs will build your traffic and reputation, commenting on reviews usually will be a waste of time.

Comments: Everyone's a critic.

When I first started writing reviews, Amazon didn't offer the option to comment on reviews. Sometimes I wish they had never come up with that idea. They are rarely helpful or insightful. Readers can be vicious. If you've got something to say, why not write your own review?



Of course, they can also be wonderful. On one of my reviews, a reader wrote, "The review was better than the book." I loved it! I also get notes like, "Thank you for a wonderful review."

So if you want to be nice or add a touch of spice, go ahead and comment. Just be aware that you probably won't get much benefit, except maybe a reply from the author and/or another reviewer.

Anyone can flag reviews *and* comments. Amazon follows up and decides (rarely) to remove the review or comment. In my opinion, they tend to err on the side of leaving things in. For instance, someone wrote a comment on my review: "How does this author have time to write 3 reviews in one day?"

I tried to flag the comment. When it was still there a few weeks later, I wrote back. "First of all, I don't read all these books at once. I might post a few reviews in one day. Second, I don't watch television. Third, I don't waste time wondering about how other people have time to write their reviews."

The whole sequence of comments was still there, last time I looked. Some people have too much time on their hands.

Once you write a review, you *can* make changes.

You can decide to edit or delete a review. But you lose all the "helpful" votes you accumulated. If you want to have a rank badge, then you have to consider whether it's worth making a change. I have some embarrassing spelling bloopers out there because I'm not willing to lose the "helpful" votes. (I'm pretty vain about my Amazon 500 status.)

If you get a lot of "not helpful" votes you can change your review and lose those, too. I've done that a few times, usually when I realize I was being overly harsh about an innocent book.

Amazon can (and will) edit your reviews.

Amazon won't actually change the words. But Amazon does edit reviews and occasionally censors some. Some of my reviews have been shortened. At least one was tossed out altogether.

These actions are rare. Mostly you can't promote yourself or (where I've gotten into the most trouble) go off on tangents. Sometimes Amazon removes a whole train of thought and replaces my words with an ellipsis...those three dots.

Writing Your Amazon Profile

Amazon gives you a lot of leeway to write your own profile. For an example of a good profile, I recommend visiting Janet Boyer's profile:

<http://www.amazon.com/gp/pdp/profile/A3UV7L5ND3EH8T>

If you have multiple audiences, choose one that is most likely to be reading books on Amazon. I would give preference to career change over Internet marketing. After all, there are other ways to reach clients of Internet marketing services and products. Career changers are more likely to turn to a book.

In keeping with the community ideal, you even get a place to record your interests. Mine are consistent with what I think a career changer might like, such as the Apprentice TV show. It also means I haven't touched my profile for a long time so you may see something different if you go there now.

Create a landing page.

These days I would recommend that you create a landing page, similar to those you can use for Facebook and Twitter.

In fact, with just a little tweaking, you can use the same landing page for all your social marketing. Here's what mine looks like:

<http://www.MakeWebsiteProfits.com/amazonpage.html>

Don't waste time with Friends on Amazon. I haven't done anything with Friends except accept a few "friend" requests. But it's nice to hear from folks online so feel free to "friend" me on Amazon if you go there. The connections have not grown the way they have on other communities, such as Facebook.

Refer to your website.

Some reviewers use their site as part of their logon names. For example: "Karen of wreckball.com"

Or they sign reviews. I've done this a couple of times:

Cathygoodwin (.com)

Most of the time these obvious plays backfire. Amazon replaces them with the 3-dot ellipsis.

But you should spend time on your reviewer profile. Many reviewers don't bother, but if you skip this step you miss an opportunity to yourself to thousands of readers under very favorable conditions.

What's your Amazon rank?

When you read a review, you're asked to check off "helpful" or "not helpful." Amazon will add up helpful votes, subtract the "not helpful" votes and get a score. This number will be your numerical rank. And yes, there are ties.

Since the system began, I hear Amazon has made changes to the ranking criteria. Now they take into account other factors, such as whether you are the first person to review a book and the overall quality of your reviews.

When you first start, your rank will be something like 10,923. If you keep writing reviews, you will move up quickly.

But let's say I'm an "Amazon-500" reviewer (which I am). It doesn't mean there are 499 people ahead of me. Because so many people write reviews, the numbers show lots of ties. So we might several hundred reviewers might be shown as rank 1000.

I actually am something like number 223 (last time I checked). But currently there are no official ranks between 500 and 100, and 100 is a long way off.

To find out a reviewer's rank, look at his or her name. Just below the name you might see what Amazon calls a "badge." If you don't see a badge, the reviewer does not have enough reviews (or helpful votes) to qualify for a badge. Click on the reviewer's name and you will get to the reviewer's profile. Click on the link to the right of the reviewer's name and you'll be taken to a list of all the reviewer's reviews.

Who's in the Top 10?

The top reviewers have reviewed several *thousand* books each. An article in Slate refers to them as celebrity reviewers. But, according to the same article, people have gotten suspicious of some prolific reviewers. Did some of them form an alliance to write multiple reviews under one name, to get the publicity? Are free book enough of a motivator?

For professionals seeking connections, these considerations are not relevant. You can get results from just a few book reviews. I started to notice rewards when I reached the Amazon 1000 rank. And most of us don't have the time to read enough books to reach Top 10 level.

I am not sure how many reviewers are ahead of me. But I know the ranks get thinner as we move closer to the top.

The #1 reviewer is Harriet Klausner. You'll find snide remarks about her reviews all over Amazon...partly because her reviews are all over Amazon. If you're really curious, and have lots of extra time, you can read a gossipy blog about her here: <http://harriet-rules.blogspot.com/>

It's not easy to con the ranking system (and why would you want to?).

You can't rate your own reviews as "helpful" or "not helpful." No voting buttons when you sign in as yourself!

If you have multiple accounts with Amazon, you probably could sign in as another person and give yourself a helpful vote. You can certainly get your friends to help.

I have heard of reviewers who gave other reviewers "not helpful" votes to drive up their own ranking. I have no idea if this happens. Frankly, I'm too busy to identify other reviewers to bash.

Anyway, a vote or two won't make that much difference to your Amazon rank and generally that's all you can "fix," unless you have a huge group of friends with lots of time on their hands.

Do you have fans?

Amazon just started to identify fans. No, readers won't vote for you as "All Star Reviewer." The mighty Amazon computers somehow track whether you've got followers who consistently read and rate your reviews. This feature is new so I'm not sure how your fans will become business connections. Anyway, it would be hard to tell because Amazon doesn't tell you the names of your fans.

Keep your eye on the goal.

Besides, if you're strategizing with Amazon, you have to look beyond the votes for "Amazon 1000" or "Amazon 500."

If your reviews are read and appreciated by your target market, who cares whether your rank is 100 or 10,000? I attracted clients before I was ranked at all.

If you look through my reviews, you'll find several where I've received many "not helpful" votes. I haven't changed or withdrawn the review because I want potential clients and business associates to know where I stand.

Sometimes I want to be associated with an unpopular position. I want to connect with like-minded readers.

Bottom Line: Keep writing consistent, high quality reviews and your popularity will take care of itself.

You won't get paid for writing reviews (and you won't get rewarded for reaching higher rank...at least not directly).

Amazon doesn't pay reviewers.

In case you're wondering, newspapers and magazines rarely pay reviewers big bucks either. After writing a lot of reviews, I wondered if I might be ready for some new writing gigs. So I interviewed a few people who wrote book reviews for money. They told me the pay was meager. Nice for a little extra cash and maybe some exposure, but you can't earn a living.

Of course, I didn't interview the top reviewers of the New York Times. But I suspect those newspaper reviewers are much less influential than they used to be. If you can get a consensus of 20 or 30 reviewers on Amazon, you might be less inclined to pay attention to the print media.

Your reward will come from building connections in the community. Some will turn into business connections.

Once you've written a lot of reviews, readers will click on your name, which leads them to a link where they can read *all* your reviews. Your reviews are presented in order of date, with the most recent first. So readers can look through dozens of reviews and get a sense of who you are.

Here are things I've gotten from book reviews:

✓Cranky emails from other readers.

One complained that I gave away the ending of The Apprentice DVD set. I pointed out that the winner of Apprentice I was on international television. If you knew the show existed, it would be hard not to know the winner's name. Still, I am more careful about sharing endings these days.

✓Notes from authors

- The author of a coaching book wrote to say "The universe created coaching..."

- Another author wrote defensively: "I disagree with your appraisal of my book..."
- An author's *mother* wrote a nice note. "Nice of you to encourage authors."
- Several authors wrote to say thanks for the review,

✓Invitations to be "friends" with readers and reviewers. I accept and do nothing.

✓Some pretty awful books that I couldn't bring myself to read, let alone review

✓Some good books I wouldn't have found otherwise. For example, I really enjoyed:

The Load by Doug White

The Codyman by Linda Stubbs

Embracing Fear by Thom Rutledge

✓CDs of easy-listening music

✓Books from publishers, often of popular books I wanted to read anyway.

And best of all...

✓Ezine subscribers

✓Buyers of my own ebooks

✓Wonderful clients

And then there are the non-material rewards...

Reviewing books is fun. If you have strong views on medical, justice, or social systems, you can find a forum. I suspect more people read book reviews more closely than read the Letters to the Editor of most newspapers.

Let's talk about the **Free Books**

The good part of reviewing is...you get books. The bad part is...you get books. Lots of books.

The reality is, most books you're asked to review will be bad. Some will be awful.

Anyway, if you're reading this Report, you're reviewing strategically to promote yourself and your business. You need to make time to read books that relate to *your* target market. You need to run your business or career. It's easy to get caught up with requests to read books that have nothing to do with your purpose.

I recommend posting a policy. Here's mine:

<http://www.makewritingpay.com/reviewpolicy.html>

When someone emails to ask if I will review a book, I will say yes or no, depending on whether the topic interests me. And I add, "Please see my review policy."

I used to err on the side of "yes." I would say yes unless I had a compelling reason to say "no." However, I now recommend turning down requests for books if they are self-published or published by a small press. They're usually bad.

To be honest, I feel sorry for authors who self-publish or who get accepted by small presses where they won't be seen. So I've made a rule: I won't give them bad reviews. If I don't like the book, I will just ignore it. These books won't get an audience anyway, so why add to the author's misery?

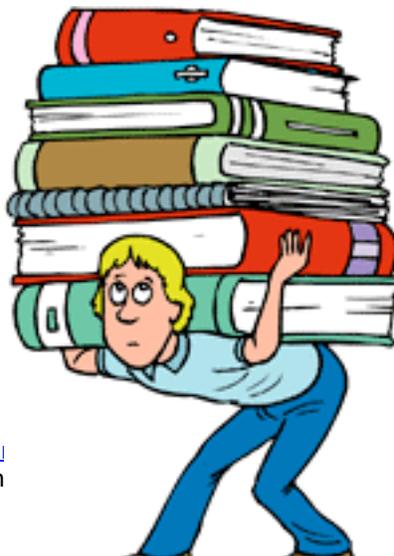
When I lived in Silver City, New Mexico, I didn't have access to a terrific library. So books were prized. Now that I live in a city with one of the greatest libraries in the world, book gifts are nice but not a reason to write book reviews. And I'm trying to make space in my apartment by clearing out bookshelves.

Occasionally a publisher or author will ask me to review a really good book I wouldn't have found otherwise. And a few times I've asked publishers if they'll send me review copies and they sometimes say yes. If I end up liking the book, it's an easy chore.

But if I don't like a book, after I've asked for it...well, it's tough. Usually I hope the author will forget he asked me.

What can you do with the books you've reviewed?

You're not supposed to sell review copies. It's especially bad form to sell them on Amazon. After all, whoever sent the books to you might notice. I usually give my review copies to a library. In fact, now that I live in Seattle, I actually send many of them to the library in Deming, New Mexico.



Section II: Tips to write the review

First, readers want to learn about a book so they can make an informed buying decision.

Some “experts will tell you to leave yourself out of the picture altogether. But of course if you make that choice, why bother writing a review at all? You’re busy! However, you need to bring in information about yourself only in context of the book.

For example, you can say, “In my experience...” or, “My training suggests...”

Communicate your perspective. If you hold certain religious or political views that affect your view of the book, disclose them upfront, especially if these values also carry over into your professional work. This step accomplishes two purposes. First, you communicate your values to prospective clients. Second, you come across as a credible source of knowledge.

Be subjective. Some people believe the question, “Is it a good book?” is different from, “Did you like the book?” I think you need to focus on whether you liked the book. Amazon is a community and you are responding as an ordinary reader. However, it’s important to explain why you liked or disliked the book.

Obviously there are infinite reasons to praise or criticize a book. If you’re looking for ideas, here a few of the most commonly cited points.

Some reasons for liking a fiction book:

- A fast read.
- Hard to put down.
- Consistent plot.
- Believable characters.
- Elegant prose style.

You have different criteria for specific genres. For instance, mystery readers want to know if the ending was plausible and if clues were provided so the reader could guess the ending.

Genre is an important concept in publishing.

Genre refers to the type of book you are reading, writing and/or reviewing. It's usually the label on the shelf where you find the book at the bookstore.

Examples of genre include memoir, nonfiction, and literary fiction. To make things more confusing, you may hear the term "genre fiction," which refers to popular books (such as murder mysteries, chick lit or science fiction) rather than literary fiction (such as books by Ewan McEwan or Edwidge Danticat).

Some books overlap genres, such as Kate Atkinson's recent book, *When Will There Be Good News*. This book overlaps mystery and literary fiction, according to some published reviews, and it was a best-seller.

However, most mixed-genre books fare poorly. Readers, like hotel guests, don't want surprises. When you are asked to review a book and the author says, "It's part memoir and part self-help," a red flag should go up. It's very hard to pull this off successfully.

You also need to distinguish "genre" from subject matter. This confusion often arises when an author writes a memoir or biography about a religious figure, such as a monk or a

reporter who writes about religion. These books fit the biography or memoir genres so, if they are faithful to the genre, they can be appreciated by readers who like biography and memoir. A book of devotions or a book that talks about the power of prayer are classified in the genre of "religion."

The same holds for politics. Hillary Clinton's autobiography is a memoir; an analysis of her role in government would probably be considered in a different genre.

Self-Help Books

Many professionals will be reading self-help and how-to books to recommend to their clients. Some reasons for liking a self-help book:

"I learned something new." This component seems to be the most critical element in a self-help book. "Break down a task into five-minute chunks" isn't new anymore. Assertiveness and "I" messages seem a little dated.

"Suggestions were realistic." Ordinary people can follow the author's advice. When a book seems targeted only to wealthy people with lots of leisure time, readers will feel resentful. For example, many books targeted to aging women encourage them to enjoy leisure and go to spas. Nearly every book will include a review (some by me!) that reminds readers, "Some women do not have the resources to carry out these programs. They need to work. They may have health and family issues."

Consistent: suggestions in one chapter don't conflict with ideas in another chapter.

Author's apparent knowledge of the subject: Glaring errors will kill the author's credibility.

Guidelines for Writing a Review

Write reviews only when you have strong feelings about a book.

Enthusiasm is contagious. If you can't say something edgy, you may need to choose another book.

Begin with an overall statement that's positive.

As with any feedback, find something positive to say, even if you can think of just enough positive material for a sentence or two. You can then address criticisms and negatives.

Offer your background in the context of the review.

Tell readers why you are qualified to write the review. Professional service providers can use this approach very effectively. In this way you can tell readers who you are and what you do, while enhancing your own credibility.

When I review career books, I explain my perspective: "As a career consultant, I've seen many clients with these challenges."

Authors can use this opportunity too. "As the author of a book on the same topic, I believe..." Of course you have to be sensitive to presenting a different perspective. Readers will be uncomfortable if you seem to be bashing another author.

Use humor with caution. Humor can backfire. Readers respond negatively if you seem to be making fun of an author. You have to remember that some readers will love

the author, no matter what. The author's mother, spouse and children will be reading your review. Often they can tolerate criticism but making fun of an author is not recommended.

Be authentic. Readers can tell when you're knocking out a puff piece to help a friend. That's why you shouldn't accept payment or reviews or write a puff piece as a favor to a friend.

Give substance to your review. Readers get annoyed with reviews that are too brief and perfunctory. Give specifics. Use page numbers to refer to key points in the book.

Readers get annoyed if you present just a summary of what the author said. They get *really* annoyed if they think you're copying or closely paraphrasing the book jacket copy. I've seen some pretty snide comments along these lines.

Take a stand. Readers don't like wishy-washy reviews. Either you liked the book or you didn't. You might like it a little, but that's okay.

But play fair. Personally, I believe a book should be judged on its own terms. If a novel is targeted to the chick-lit character, you can't expect it to compete with *War and Peace* or even *The Atonement* in literary style and depth. I've awarded five stars to some very light books because they were appropriate to their genre.

The flip side is that I believe a book should meet expectations created by the publisher and author. If the jacket promises to reveal 3 secrets, I want to read those secrets. If not, we've been cheated.

What if you're a minority of one? Everybody else likes a book and you hate it (or vice versa). I say stick to your guns. That's how you'll connect with potential clients

Cathy Goodwin, Ph.D.

<http://www.copy-cat-copywriting.com>

<http://www.BoostBusinessWithBookReviews.com>

and associates who share your views. They'll admire you for standing up for yourself, too.

For example, I am very opposed to all forms of career testing and I distrust functional resumes. When I review career books, I make those points clear. I've had clients and subscribers comment on these positions: "I'm so glad you said you hate career tests. I just got burned..."

A Word on Sticky Situations

When you're reviewing a book by someone who's in a difficult position, such as a cancer survivor or sufferer, you have to be sensitive. Once I was critical of a fairly popular book about a woman struggling with breast cancer. Mainly I pointed out that this woman was quite privileged and she still had a hard time dealing with the medical community.

That review disappeared. I've always suspected the staff felt I was bashing the cancer patient. I wasn't. But now I won't touch a book that sensitive unless I'm ready to give it an enthusiastic review.

A more recent example: I reviewed a book about loss of mental capabilities associated with aging. I felt (and still feel) the book was based on sloppy research. The author suggested that the slightest mental lapse (such as forgetting where you parked your car) was a sign of aging. I believe there's a need to differentiate normal and abnormal memory lapses.

Bam! I acquired a ton of "not helpful" votes and some rather nasty comments. I decided not to withdraw the review. After all, some people agreed with me and I don't mind being a contrarian in this field. A psychotherapist or life coach might exercise more caution when writing about issues of aging or health.

Three mistakes guaranteed to turn off your readers:

- ✓ Blatant self-promotion (if you can even get by Amazon's scrutiny)
- ✓ Too little content in the review
- ✓ Careless writing

How to Gain Credibility With Your Reviews

✓ Show that you're a booklover rather than a promoter.

For example, you can review books beyond your business scope. I review mysteries, humor, history and biography. Even though you are reviewing strategically, you need to show that you really do enjoy the books.

✓ Share your experiences...selectively.

For example, let's say you are reviewing a book on career change. And suppose you were unemployed but used the book to help find a job. It's totally appropriate to say how the book helped or didn't help.

Recently I read an article by a well-known author, advising people to share their stories as they write reviews. He was writing to job hunters. Do you want your new boss to know all about the trials and tribulations you experienced while searching for this job? I don't think so.

If you are self-employed, it is even more important to be aware of how you'll come across. As with any social medium – Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn – or your own website, you need to remember that anyone can be reading this book.

If you present yourself as inept and incompetent, or if you talk about how much trouble you had getting a job, your current boss might read your review and get a little nervous.

✓ Avoid reviews that are completely negative (“trashing” the book) or rave reviews (almost certainly marking you as a friend of the author).

✓ Be evenhanded. Open with a positive comment, even if you hate the book, and including negatives (I call them “quibbles”) even for those you love.

✓ Disclose your biases or potential for biases. For example, you can say, “I know the author and we are friends.” Or you can say, “I am biased because I’ve had bad experiences with this type of service.”

✓ Demonstrate logical thinking. A logical discussion – whether or not you like the book – will draw readers. I’ve gotten the strongest responses to reviews that were more like essays – incorporating my ideas and incidentally communicating why I might be a good resource for the reader.

✓ Refer to research. Readers like expertise so they can get a context while reading. However, you can’t overdo. I used to refer to academic sources to make a point (especially a negative point). But getting a lot of “non-helpful” votes forced me to change.



Section III: Attracting Clients, Subscribers and Buyers

Each market will be different, but here are some strategies I have used.

Showcase your expertise.

One Amazon Top 10 sent me a private message on Twitter. She has gotten many clients from her own book reviews. She confirmed what I have been saying. Many reviews get exposure. Getting known as an expert in a niche will draw clients.

As you discuss a book, you can describe your credentials to demonstrate your expertise. In my experience, it's appropriate to give the reader a context for your review. If you're a medical doctor, you are in a unique position to comment on a book about diets, disease or health care in the twenty-first century.

For example, you can say, "On page 27, the author suggests avoiding carbohydrates. But in my practice, I find..." Or conversely you could say, "I am glad to see the author recommending that you avoid carbohydrates. My patients who follow this guideline tend to live longer..."

Target best-sellers as they're rising up the charts.

Readers will notice your review most if you publish in the earlier stages of the book's life cycle. Once a book has 30 or 40 or more reviews, you may be lost in the crowd.

The earliest reviews on a book tend to get the most "helpful" votes simply because readers are looking for help and they're not finding many reviews to choose from. To take

just one example, look at the reviews for the book *Until Proven Innocent*. The first “most helpful” reviews received well over 100 “helpful” votes. Shortly afterward, the next highest vote-getter received less than 50.

There are exceptions. In one example, I submitted a review of a book after many reviews had been written. However, most of the earlier reviews were puff pieces. My review earned over 100 “helpful” votes. The second-most helpful earned about 30. Authenticity still counts.

Amazon used to identify spotlight reviews – a few reviews that they considered especially well-written, especially in the early days of a book’s publication. So being early was even more valuable a few years ago.

I loved spotlight reviews, for selfish reasons. Being in the spotlight gives you a lot of attention. My review was the Spotlight Review for Po Bronson. I earned over 400 “helpful” votes and at least 2 clients found me as a result of that review. It wasn’t a literary masterpiece, but it worked.

Today Amazon ranks reviews by helpful votes. They’re more even-handed. They list the most helpful negative review – the one-star and two-star reviews. They also list the most helpful positive reviews.

The older version was more like having the All-Star game players chosen by sports journalist, while the newer version resembles the WNBA where All-Star players get picked by the fans. Definitely you get more visibility if your review gets more helpful votes...but of course then you can earn even more. Still, I wouldn’t lose sleep over it.

Target controversial books.

You’ll attract like-minded clients as you reveal your own biases and your strengths.

Example: Annie Paul's book, *The Cult of Personality*, takes on the world of personality tests, exposing flaws in the sacred Myers-Briggs, Rorschach and MMPI. Anyone who reads my review will know where I stand. If they want a no-test career consultation, they know where to find me.

Controversial books attract interest from readers, who actually read the reviews.

Create some controversy even if the book doesn't.

Sometimes I'll share my own skepticism. For example, when reviewing a book about coaching, I raised a question, "Did success come from the coach or the coach training?" Lots of comments came from that one!

I've also spoken out against those chirpy books on aging – the authors who try to convince "us" that "we" can be happy as a teacher's aide or a Wal-Mart greeter.

Caution: Use your judgment about what's too controversial.

Let's say your good friend writes a book about his rather unusual value system or a "how to" book about some complicated "intimate" practices. Or you are asked to review a book with a strong religious or political message.

Your potential prospects and business associates may be reading those reviews. You can choose to review them anonymously, but that's probably not what these authors want. You may decide that most people won't notice (which is probably true) or that you're too swamped for even one more review this year (which is what I would say).

This just happened to me once. Let's just say that if I'm too embarrassed to repeat the title to a group of strangers, I won't review the book.

Recycle your reviews.

Include them on your blogs and websites. Consider revising them as articles. Ezinearticles.com has a book review section; why not submit for extra coverage? I don't know the impact of those book reviews but there's little cost to trying for yourself. I suspect article book reviews will vary in usefulness depending on your field and the book's genre.

Amazon's site says reviews become the "property" of Amazon, but makes no mention of exclusive rights. I recommend making at least a few changes before submitting them elsewhere. I don't know how stringently this policy is enforced, if at all. But it's usually a good idea to avoid submitting duplicate content for a number of reasons.

Be true to your beliefs.

I've covered the topic earlier but it's worth repeating. When a friend asks you to review a book, explain that you will be honest. Don't let anyone dictate your reviews. A puffy review of a bad book will hurt you *and* the author. s

Join the Amazon Associate Program

The Associates program is Amazon's affiliate program. You can make a small amount of money recommending specific Amazon books on your website, ezine or blog. When website visitors click through on your link, you get a small commission.

Compared to other affiliate programs, Amazon isn't very rewarding. You get just a few cents – maybe a few dollars – for every book your visitors buy after they click through your

link. Worst of all, your link has a limited shelf life: just a few days. That means if someone clicks through on your link, you get commission for everything they buy for a day or two (unless they click through someone else's link – then the other person gets the commission).

Do Authors Secretly Review Their Own Books?

Sometimes they do. But (a) they can get embarrassed and (b) it doesn't do any good.

One author admits that he reviewed his own book under another name. He was getting creamed by the reviewers. So he wrote his own 5-star reviews. It didn't help. Read the story here.

<http://archive.salon.com/21st/feature/1999/03/02feature.html>

Information Week's blog recently speculated on the possibility of fake reviews: <http://tinyurl.com/akwa48>

But frankly, why bother? You would do better to work on your author profile and review other people's books, identifying yourself as an author of a related title.

Besides, if you're book isn't good, reviews won't save you. And if the word gets out, you'll be awfully embarrassed.

And a final word...

I hope you're inspired to write your own reviews!
Drop me a line and I'll go look them up. You might even get
a "helpful" vote from me (but only if I really like the book).



Next steps

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