

How To Get Your Book Reviewed On Amazon

Book Marketing Online In the 21st Century

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Introduction

Congratulations! You have achieved what every author (and nearly every reader) hopes to achieve: a published book.

What you probably know: These days, you are a marketer as well as an author. Even the “New York publishers” will have limited funds to help with your marketing. I once met an author who reported, slightly stunned, “Even though they gave me a 6-figure advance, they didn’t help with marketing the book. You would think they’d want to protect their investment.”

Yes, you would, but good luck! Not in this lifetime.

So what do you do next? Your marketing pro, publicist and/or publisher probably gave you the same advice: Get some book reviews on Amazon. They were right.

As an author, you need to **get in front of readers**, preferably readers who are interested in **exactly the same kind of book you wrote**. So how do you do this?

Here’s the old way...

When I wrote my own book ([Making The Big Move](#), published by New Harbinger in 1999) I made the rounds of live bookstores. At first it was fun. I love public speaking. I am a dynamic, entertaining speaker.

But even I became tired and frustrated. Sometimes only a few people showed up. Even when I drew a crowd, many audience members were just there to listen. So I’d spend several hours and then maybe sell a dozen books: not a great way to develop a track record.

As I watched other authors, I discovered I was not unique. When you become an author, you attend readings with a new mindset. You realize that many people regard author readings as free entertainment. Even best-selling authors sometimes show up at a venue, expecting a full house, only to find 3 lonely people in the audience. Even worse, they soon discover that these 3 people all read the book at their local public library and have no intention of buying that day.

These days fewer authors are making the rounds of live bookstores. Book tours were never glamorous or fun and now they're rarely even possible. Publishers are reluctant to pay most authors' expenses and frankly, it's no longer fun for authors. Planes are crowded. Hotels are impersonal and expensive. Delays are common. Even top authors, who get luxury accommodations, wind up exhausted.

Don't get me wrong. I wouldn't turn down a book tour. But these days, you need to do much more.

Actually one author *did* turn down a book tour in favor of creating his own DIY book tour. He volunteered to visit private homes and give readings for the host's friends. He slept on their couches and was a guest in their home. He sold just over one thousand books by the time this article appeared. And, despite the negatives, he thought this approach was more productive than a tour of bookstores.

[Read his essay here](#), from the January 17, 2010, Sunday New York Times book section. Later we will talk about an even better idea: blog book tours so you never leave home.

The New Way to Promote: Hang out In Cyberspace.

First we are going to talk about the Amazon gold mine that any author can use, without investing any money.

There are two ways to work with Amazon book reviews. First, get your own book reviewed. The first part of this Report focuses on getting your book reviewed on Amazon – the right way.

The second part of this book explains briefly how to expand your audience by writing reviews of other authors' books. If I ruled the world, every author would become an Amazon 1000 book reviewer (as a minimum) before publishing. You need to do this for 3 reasons:

- ➔ You will understand the process (and perils) of getting your own book reviewed. You will discover why reviewers groan when you ask, "Will you review my book?"
- ➔ You draw attention to yourself and your book when you review books. Reviewers tend to prowl around Amazon and they will notice your reviews. Some will look up your book. The result is...more reviews.
- ➔ You just might write a better book. And for sure you'll understand more about book promotion.

Finally, we will briefly explore ways to supplement your book reviews with blogs, blog book tours and other Internet resources.

Why You Need Amazon Book Reviews.

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:

Cathy Goodwin, Ph.D.
<http://www.copy-cat-copywriting.com>

<http://tinyurl.com/cmX6df>

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. Most important, reviews will reach targeted readers: serious prospects who are already searching for you, your book's category and/or your book's genre.

A word on Genre:

When you talk to a literary agent or publisher, you quickly encounter the word "genre." Publishers, bookstores and libraries insist on classifying books by genre. Readers may not realize they care about genre, but often when they write reviews they unconsciously show they notice. As you read through reviews, you will see sentences like, "It was listed as a mystery but seemed more like a soap opera."

You can think of genre as the heading you find in bookstores over shelves. Bookstores will keep your book in one section only. Therefore, the more your book falls unambiguously into one category or another, the more likely readers will find it.

For some online discussions on genre, along with examples of types of genre, see

<http://askville.amazon.com/identity-define-book-genres/AnswerViewer.do?requestId=5061035>

and

<http://www.booknutsreadingclub.com/genrelist.html>

Why Authors Should Focus on Amazon

I will focus on the Amazon community because it's the best known of the online bookstores. You may reach potential readers with B&N and other online bookstores and review sites. But Amazon has become the Gold Standard. Major

book publishers used to provide review copies only to print reviewers. Now they also send review copies to Amazon reviewers and Amazon's Vine program. These publishers are voting for Amazon with their own products.

However, Amazon book reviews are not enough to promote your book successfully. For many books they are necessary but they are rarely sufficient. Later you will learn about how to supplement your reviews with other marketing tools.

Why I Am Writing This Ebook.

I am a published author. My book was not self-published: it was published by New Harbinger in 1999. When I wrote my book, it never occurred to me to seek Amazon reviews. I did get some reviews but thought I had no power to influence the process.

Today authors are more sophisticated. Many authors send me for reviews. Most of them make fundamental mistakes that lead me to say "no." When I do review books, the authors make additional mistakes that lead to a weak review. Sometimes when I go to a website, I can see that an author has already set up his or her book for failure.

I review in several genres: self-help, mystery, memoir and more. Over time, I have learned the ingredients of a book that leads to four-star and five-star reviews. They're pretty specific.

If you work with a New York publisher, you probably have many of the bases covered. For one thing, you can't get past the acquisitions editor if you can't identify your book's genre. You'll need a one-minute synopsis, too. But when you self-publish, or when you work with a small press, you may need to review your strategy.

Ideally you will read this Report *before* you write your book. But don't worry: you will benefit also when your book is ready for review.

Viewing an Amazon Listing From an Author's Perspective

Chances are you've been on the Amazon website many times. You've seen dozens (maybe hundreds) of reviews. But you need to view them differently when you are an author.

Here's why.

When you are an author, a book review suddenly works not only as an aid to help you choose a book to read, but also as a *tool to market your book*. As you read review of competing books, you're trying to get ideas about possible reviewers who can help by reviewing *your* book.

So to get started, let's take a detailed look at an Amazon book review. I can't take a screen shot due to copyright laws: the screens are Amazon's property. I'd encourage you to open a window of a review right now and take a look.

As an example, we will use Po Bronson's book: What Should I Do With My Life? I will talk about my review simply because I don't need permission and I know it was successful. You can go there directly when you click here, if you are online, or <http://whatnext.notlong.com> or <http://tinyurl.com/4oxjl>

You will notice the book is no longer in print in hardcover version. One way to assess current demand for a book is to look at prices of available copies. Here prices start as low as .01. Even best-sellers usually come to an end, especially nonfiction books.

Now we will look at the review from an author's perspective. Suppose you were writing a book about careers, life or challenges of living at mid-life. As you read this review you would be asking two questions.

First, you'd want to get a sense of how books in your genre and on *your* topic were evaluated by other reviewers.

Second, you want to decide if a particular reviewer should be invited to review your book.

Let's answer these questions.

Anatomy Of A Book Review From An Author's Perspective.

Scroll down past the 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.

Votes are the coin of the realm for Amazon reviewers. As we will see below, "helpful" votes give you visibility and ultimately contribute to ranking. For some reason, this review attracted large numbers of "helpful" votes. You'll also see the power of Amazon reviewers. This review was extremely successful; you'll see that nearly 500 people saw my review and clicked on "helpful" or "not helpful." Thankfully, nearly all were helpful.

Notice the power of reviews to attract targeted attention. Every one of those 500 visitors expressed an interest in this topic.

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. Then they update to Amazon 500 and Amazon 100. The labels may change; I think they used to have Amazon 200.

Amazon reviewers are ranked based on Amazon's secret system. Most of the ranking is based on the ratio of "helpful" to "not helpful" votes, with a few undisclosed criteria added to the mix. No one knows exactly how reviewers are ranked; being first to review a book is rumored to be among the criteria, along with some "quality" consideration.

Although I wrote this review many years ago, Amazon automatically updated my ranking, added the "Vine" badge and changed my city. When I wrote the review my rank was 1,000 and I lived in New Mexico. The Vine program did not exist.

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, taking into account Amazon's other secret factors.

When we talk about choosing a reviewer, we will explain why these badges might help you choose a reviewer...and why you need to know exactly how to approach top reviewers.

You will also see that I use my real name and I'm a "Vine Voice." We will talk about this later.

But now...

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. If you plan to ask me to review your book, you will want to click on this link. You'll get an idea of what I review, what I look for and how fussy I am.

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. If I review your book, someone might see your book even when they're not looking.

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.

Now you will understand the terms used and the ideas discussed as we proceed.

How To Use A Review Will Begin to Help You Market Your Book Questions

When I wrote this review, I had no intention of writing a book like this. Even if I did, I would still write the best review possible. Keep in mind what we said earlier. The

audience for each review is the Amazon community, not the author.

Here are the questions you can answer by reading reviews like this one.

Question 1: What do reviewers expect from books on this topic or in this genre?

Obviously, you would want to look at several dozen reviews. But starting here, notice that I immediately say, "This is not a self-help book." Now you see that readers expect books on this topic to be in the self-help genre. If your book focuses on careers but isn't self-help, you will need to make sure readers and reviewers understand where you're coming from. Po Bronson has a name so he'll get lots of advance press and the benefit of doubt. Even so, some reviewers still looked for a self-help book.

Additionally, I mention that Bronson's roles overlap. He's not a distant journalist; he becomes involved in his interviewees' lives and experiences emotion. Again, I believe reviewers look for clarity. If you report a journey where you talked to many people, you may be closer to the memoir genre than the self-help or non-fiction informational genres.

As you read more reviews, you get an idea of what readers expect from a book on this topic.

Question 2: Should I invite this reviewer to review my book?

If you wrote a career book or self-help book, this review might encourage you to invite me to review your book. You would learn that I do review books on this topic. But you would be aware that I'm pretty fussy and demanding. If you

were looking for a puffy glowing review, you wouldn't send me your book unless you were very sure of the quality.

You would see that I review frequently and my reviews are credible because I get so many "helpful" votes and I'm a Vine Voice. I recommend including a few ranked reviewers on your list.

But ranked reviewers can be difficult. We take longer to review your book because we get so many. We may refuse to review your book. I turn down more requests than I accept. Most experienced, credible reviewers will be honest (or choose not to review the book unless they like it).

Now you see why the best way to get great reviews is to...

Start by writing a good book.

Up to now we've talked about the power of Amazon reviewers. But you need to understand the limits also.

A dozen (even 100) glowing reviews will not save a book the market doesn't want. When readers don't like your book, they will not only write negative reviews. They will go after the reviewers who gave you the glowing reports.

When you are self-publishing, do your homework. Don't wait until the book is finished.

Think Like A Big Publisher To Generate Big Sales

The term "New York publisher" refers to the big name publishers, such as Wiley or Simon & Schuster, even though some are no longer located in New York. Even if your publishing house is your kitchen table, you can improve your chances of success by studying how the New York publishers operate.

When your book IS published by a big house, you will be a step ahead. Reviewers know that your book was edited and market-tested. You also get access to distribution channels. But you still have to be your own best marketer.

➔ The ONE step most self-publishing authors skip: Write a detailed book proposal, even when you are publishing your own book.

Today when you write a non-fiction book for a publisher (such as HarperCollins or Wiley) you will be asked for a lengthy book proposal. Fifty to 100 pages will not be unusual. This proposal becomes a working document as you write the book.

If you are a non-fiction author and you do not know how to write a book proposal, please visit

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

I've listed three of the most popular and (in my opinion) most important books to walk you through the process. Some literary agents have sample proposal forms on their websites. Many refer you to those three books.

Many self-published authors skip this step. After all, why write a proposal to yourself? But you will find that once you've analyzed the competition and identified your target audience, you will be able to market your book effectively. Fiction authors write proposals after they write their entire book, especially if they're new. Non-fiction authors write proposals *before* they write their books. Most publishers view memoir as closer to fiction than nonfiction, so you probably need a whole book.

If you are still writing a nonfiction book, I recommend that you write the proposal and then the marketing copy.

What will the jacket copy look like? Can you write a whole sales page about the book?

As you write your book, you can address the points that make the book easy to market. You can add what publicists and copywriters call “hooks” in each chapter.

Are you writing a memoir or novel? Look up books that tell you how to submit your book to a publisher. Typically a novelist will write the book and then write a synopsis. He will explain why his book will be welcomed by readers in the same genre and compare his book to those of other authors.

Memoir resembles fiction more than non-fiction. Of course, you can get into trouble when you present a book as memoir and it’s really fiction. You can also generate controversy when readers question whether your memoir is fiction. When you google “Martha Beck - Leaving The Saints” or just read the reviews for this book, you will get a sense of how readers react when they doubt the author’s premise.

➔ Best-selling published memoirs aren’t just diaries or core dumps of an author’s memories. They follow structures that you need to understand. Most best-selling memoirs describe the author’s journey as he or she conquers obstacles, grows through experience, and triumphs at the end. Some of my favorite memoirs:

[The Kids Are All Right](#) by Diana Welch

[Vows](#) by Peter Manseau

[The Longest Trip Home](#) by John Grogan (author of Marley and Me, which might also be called a memoir)

[The Man Who Outgrew His Prison Cell](#) by Joe Loya

[A Mountain of Crumbs](#) by Elena Gorokhova

➔Go to Amazon and your local bookstore and grab a handful of books about memoir writing. Check their Amazon reviews before you buy and especially before you follow their guidelines.

➔Many books sent for review try to combine memoir with another genre. This combo rarely works. A great memoir will stand on its own. Readers will learn their own lessons.

Hire A Marketer *Before* You Hire An Editor

Many authors begin their self-published writing project by hiring an editor. That's almost always a mistake. If you follow the rule, "What Would a New York Publisher Do?" you will understand why.

New York publishers do not agree to invest in a book until they recognize the book's appeal to a market. They do not assign content editors till they've agreed to publish and the contract is signed.

If you're not familiar with the process, you may get confused by the term "editor." An acquisitions editor is a marketer. She looks for authors who are likely to write books that sell. She reviews proposals from authors who believe they can write books that sell.

When people read that the late Jackie Kennedy was an editor, they often don't realize she was an acquisitions editor. She wasn't hired for her writing skill. She was hired because famous people would return her phone calls. Her job was to convince them to write a book for her publishing company and then find resources to help them accomplish this goal.

When you finish your book and put on your book marketing hat, you will need a marketable product. The earlier you

begin to consider what's marketable, the easier your book marketing challenge will be.

I realize this idea may seem painful. Authors tend to love language and ideas. Yet sadly books sometimes sell based on other factors, such as timeliness of topic and author's star power.

Some books are created entirely on the basis of marketing. I remember reading about an author who researched hot topics, then wrote a book about getting "thin thighs in 30 days." She discovered women were more concerned about thighs than other body parts. She knew the power of "30 days."

I'm not suggesting you do the same. But if you are on a mission to share your ideas and you have a message, it might be helpful to stop and ask, "Do people really want to hear my message?" If your book has been written, ask how you can present it as a solution to problems readers already worry about.

The Best-Seller Mindset For Self-Published Authors

When you self-publish, you will become your own Acquisitions Editor. Put on your marketing hat and review your book critically. If you are writing your first book and you can't be objective, hire a marketing consultant or copywriter.

➔ Some editors can perform these roles but don't assume they will. Even editors who have worked with authors on the New York Times best-seller list may not understand marketing.

When You Have a Marketable Book, You Will Get Great Reviews.

Thom Rutledge, a psychotherapist from Tennessee, sent me a copy of his book, [Embracing Fear](#), right after it was published. He didn't ask. He just sent it via Amazon.

It's a terrific book. I liked it so much I didn't stop with a glowing Amazon review. I recommended the book strongly in my ezine and on my website.

A marketable book, targeted to the right reviewer, will usually lead to good (or even great) reviews. Good writing is essential but following conventions of the genre will be even more important.

Now here's where you need to develop a thick skin (sorry, but you'll save a lot of pain later). Sometimes people write a specialty book that's not designed to be marketable. For example:

- ❁ Your family has a unique history and you want to record your grandfather's story while he's still living.

- ❁ You had a special experience and want to preserve the memories.

- ❁ You (and maybe some colleagues) created a book to be sold to audience members when you give live speeches or seminars.

These book categories can be meaningful and important, but you will run into trouble when you seek reviews. Reviewers won't know how to evaluate these books because they don't fit the most common criteria.

But don't give up on your book idea.

A family book can have immense value for generations to come.

A collection of essays or a book supporting your work can be lucrative as a marketing tool for coaches and consultants. You may be able to charge more for your work because you have a book. Often you will get speaking engagements more easily when you have a published book, even if your book is self-published. Sometimes you can make a deal with a group: they won't pay you an honorarium but they will buy a certain number of copies of books.

But will you get good reviews from a stranger on Amazon? That's a different question. I've tried to review collections of essays. Now I usually turn down the request.

Unlocking The Secret of Amazon Book Reviews.

Now we will get to one of your first book marketing steps: getting your book reviewed on Amazon. Before you go any further, please write this down:

AMAZON IS A COMMUNITY.

Write this sentence on a sheet of paper and paste it to your wall. Read it every day before you ask for reviews. You'll avoid many of the most common pitfalls.

What does "community" mean?

Every community has written and unwritten rules for members. Reviewers have to respect all those rules. They need to realize they are writing for a community, not as an advocate or representative of the author.

The community wants to believe that reviews are honest. Therefore, the community does not look kindly on puff pieces. When you ask a handful of friends to write glowing

reviews, your book needs to measure up. Otherwise you will be embarrassed.

New readers will believe the puff pieces. They will buy your book. If your book doesn't measure up to the reviews, they will write negative reviews of their own. They might even ridicule the other reviewers.

For example...

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.

Apparently the author's daughter felt sorry for her dad, who was getting all those bad reviews. She sent a message to the family's friends, asking everyone to please write a nice review.

The ploy backfired. Reviewers still wrote bad reviews! You can read the story here: <http://tinyurl.com/d2hl78>

A scarier example...

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. The publicist apparently paid Grady Harp to write the review, but never told the author. 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. And it's even more significant

that the secret was revealed by the community.

<http://tinyurl.com/7y9lt5>

Community rules mean you can't get reviews before the book is published (unless your book is accepted into the Amazon Vine program).

Reviewers can't write reviews on advance copies of books except through the Amazon Vine program. It's a (we'll say it again) community. Everyone (in theory) must have access...unless the community leaders waive the rule.

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. Only the community leaders can make exceptions.

Community means that errors will be discovered, fast.

Are you planning to write a book about parents of troubled teens (my favorite imaginary example)? At least one of your reviewers may have credentials as a psychiatrist or psychologist who specializes in whatever you write about.

Incorrect facts and implausible scenarios will be revealed faster on Amazon than on more conventional review venues. As an author, you can be embarrassed easily.

For instance, one of my favorite mystery authors is Margaret Maron. I love her heroine, Deborah Knott, who is a judge in North Carolina.

In one book, Maron sends her heroine off to substitute for another judge in a town that holds a furniture show every year. The plot depends on Judge Knott arriving with no reservations to find that every hotel room is taken.

One reviewer identified herself as a lawyer in North Carolina. She's known dozens of judges just like Deborah Knott. She pointed out that this scenario could never take place. A judge wouldn't sleep on a stranger's couch. She has access to a secretary who would make reservations. She could get a cot set up at the court house.

Luckily for Maron, the review appeared quite a while after the book was published. Maron is established as an author but if this book had been her first, she would have trouble gaining credibility with her readers. Mystery authors are tough! Some will forgive an implausible setting but many will never trust the author again.

As I was putting the final touches on this ebook Report, I found myself in a lively debate about the credibility of Lisa Scottoline's mystery, [Think Twice](#). Another Vine Voice reviewer was convinced that certain events in the book were implausible. I found a few coincidences, which mystery reviewers usually criticize, but generally everything that happened *could* have happened.

However, Scottoline is a well-established author who's even more famous than Maron. She has a reputation for meticulous research. Readers trust her.

If Amazon doesn't remove our comments, you can read them online. Be warned: they do contain spoilers, so you may want to read the book first.

Non-fiction books come under scrutiny even more.

Through the Vine program I read a memoir by the mother of a child described as autistic. One reviewer identified himself as a child psychiatrist. Claiming the child was not "really" autistic, he was critical of therapists who were too quick to make a diagnosis. Other reviewers identified themselves as experts who disagreed with *this* expert.

So...how can you get a review of *your* book?

I am horrified when I hear what some authors go through trying to get books reviewed on Amazon. Since I get quite a few requests, I have discovered some ways these authors could save themselves much grief (and money, too).



What NOT to Do

Do NOT hire someone to write reviews for you.

While researching this ebook, I came across a site designed to help authors market their books. It's called <http://www.readerspoils.com/index.html>

This site matches books with reviewers. Reviewers apparently get Starbucks cards and other goodies...like the books. Authors pay \$15 for an Amazon review and \$25 for an EzineArticles review.

I can't imagine why an author would want to use this service. Reviewers apparently are identified as representing the ReaderSpoils company. The Amazon community gets this message:

"Your review was purchased. It's not genuine. Don't trust the author."

Apart from the fees, I encourage you to look at their reviews. To my eye, they seem short and poorly written. They won't help you. For example, Look up *Dogs of Meadowbrook* (Paperback) by William Schwenn.

Notice those reviews. When I see seven 5-star reviews, I become suspicious and sure enough at least one reviewer seems to be associated with the "reviews for pay" groups.

Why bother? One or two rave reviews will not save your book. I've written strong reviews of self-published books I believed in. Some of the books gained an audience. At least one was acquired by a New York publisher. Sadly, many self-published books meet a different fate.

Here are a few of my favorites:

[I Am The Codyman](#) by Linda Stubbs

[Tales From A Dog Catcher](#) by Lisa Duffy-Korpics

[Mrs. Lieutenant](#) by Phyllis Zimbler-Miller

[Swallow](#) by Tonya Plank

I didn't know any of these authors when they asked me to review their books. I was totally honest: they were good books. They didn't have to pay me.

If you pay \$15-25 for a review, you'll probably buy half a dozen reviews at most. Frankly, I think half a dozen weak reviews will actually backfire. But even worse, they won't make a difference.

Look at [Tales from a Dog Catcher](#), with (at last count) nine 5-star reviews. I really wanted to see this book succeed. But even these nine reviews couldn't do enough. Ironically, we reviewers may have created a loss of credibility because it's rare to see even nine glowing reviews. However, the reviews seem solid and not written as puff pieces. Mine certainly wasn't. I loved the book.

Cathy Goodwin, Ph.D.

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

Later we will talk about some strategies to promote your book beyond getting reviews. I believe these authors could have done many things to create a wider audience for their books.

Do NOT send an email message with blatant grammar errors and awkward writing.

If your email is hard to read and poorly written, what can we reviewers expect from the book? After all, most authors send the same message to many authors. Why wouldn't you take a few minutes to write it carefully?

A typo or two? Well, that happens to everyone. But at least demonstrate that you have some writing talent. After all, you are an author! Writing a message should be easy.

Do NOT suggest that the reviewer click on a link to get more information about the book. A professional writer should be able to summarize the book and pique the reviewer's interest in just one blurb. Ideally, you will develop this summary *before* you write the book because you anticipate the question, "Why will the market like your book?"

➔ A link to your Amazon author page is fine; in fact, it's a good idea.

Do NOT ask reviewers to review anything other than a hard copy of the book. I don't mean "hardback." I mean "hard *copy*."

Paperbacks are fine. Even galleys are fine. But please don't ask anyone to write a review based on one chapter, as one author did. Don't send a pdf as an attachment without asking. These days you can offer a choice of PDF versus

hard copy, as some reviewers may have Kindles. But don't count on it.

Do NOT hound reviewers. They're busy. Often I'm operating with a backlog so a review might not appear for a few weeks or even months after I receive the book. Sometimes I can't even remember if I received a book.

One site claiming expertise on book reviews includes this advice:

"Publishers send out self-addressed post cards, asking reviewers to drop them in the mail as acknowledgment..."

"Within 10 days of mailing out your review copy, call the reviewer and ask about the current status of the book."

No reputable reviewer, they assure us, will object.

Well, I've never, *ever* received a self-addressed post card from a publisher. I rarely get to a review within ten days after I receive the book. And if I can't give you a positive review, I may say nothing unless you specifically tell me otherwise.

Do NOT complain about your review. A four-star review may be more powerful than a glowing puff piece. If you insist on getting only glowing reviews, pay a service or ask your friends. And live with the consequences.

Never, ever ask a reviewer to change something.
Period.

Do NOT write a comment to the review to attack the reviewer or defend yourself. Even if the reviewer made a factual mistake, you're usually better off saying nothing. You come across as whiny even when your point is totally

legitimate. You would do better to ask a friend to add the comment on your behalf. Usually, if you wait long enough, the community will chime in and save you.

Do NOT spend a lot of money on packaging. Often I suspect some authors spend more on packaging than on editing and marketing consultants. A beautiful package – gold wrapping, glossy flyers – won't compensate for a poorly written book. I toss out everything but the book itself and suspect most other reviewers do too. Save your money and the planet's trees.

DO Choose Your Reviewer carefully.

identify reviewers who have reviewed books similar to yours. Most of us have areas where we feel comfortable.

For example, if you read my reviews, eventually you will notice that I say, over and over again, "I am not a parent." I also review books on aging and mid-life issues, so you can tell I'm not in an age group where people usually start families. Books like "Caring for your Newborn" would not be a good choice for me.

DO make sure your description is complete.

Often authors describe their books along the lines of, "the experiences of ten women in corporate America." As a prospective reviewer, I would like to know much more. Is the author writing about ten executive women? Are they all from the same company or from different companies? Is the book more about the women and their lives or is the author writing a business book? Is the book set up as a series of interviews with ten women or does each woman write a chapter? Or does the book cover the experiences of these women as part of a stronger narrative?

If the author writes about the struggle of women to maintain work-life balance, I probably would say “No thanks.” But if she gives us a window on life inside the executive suite, I probably would want to be a reviewer.

For some examples of good descriptions, go to Amazon.com and view books in your genre. Look at the book description provided. Which descriptions motivate you to read the book?

Here is one example from a book I read recently, *Louder Than Words*. It’s a how-to self-help book about reading body language, from a former FBI agent: <http://bit.ly/bPINcW>

This description is set up in bullet format, especially appropriate for a website description, but would be useable in a letter to a reviewer. This book seems to be doing well, suggesting the description works.

Another good example: Check out the paperback version of Martha Beck’s best-selling *Finding Your Own North Star*, a very popular career change guide. Here you will find not a description, but reviews that include entertaining and accurate descriptions, written in paragraph form. You could write your own description with this format or you could use reviews like these:

<http://bit.ly/aSp7Uk>

DO provide some credentials and background in your query letter.

Recently I was invited to review a book on climate change. I rarely review popular science books. The query letter included quotes from reviewers, a very brief description...and absolutely no information about the author. Is he a scientist, journalist, politician, professor, or independent expert? Why did he write this book?

The author promises a balanced view on a controversial topic, but what qualifies him to offer a neutral view when even scientists disagree strongly?

DO create an effective website.

A link to your website will supplement your query letter. When I'm curious or debating whether to ask an author to invest in a review copy, I will try to find a website. You come across as a professional when you include the link in your review query.

Often an author's website simply invites us to buy the book. That's fine, if you have put together an informative sales letter, especially if you write an ebook or self-published business book. But a busy reviewer will want to get some questions answered, fast, about you and your book.

For really strong examples of book websites, see these examples.

Example 1:

<http://www.meghanwier.com>

I was so impressed with Meghan's website that I asked her to preview a copy of this Report. Although much of Meghan's site is not about the book, all the info about her business adds credibility. The book page includes a link to the Amazon listing.

Example 2:

<http://www.barbaraehrenreich.com/brightsided.htm>

Ehrenreich of course is an international best-selling author with a sophisticated website. However, any webmaster than replicate the structure of this page. Notice how much detail we are given. This site would be a good model for an author of multiple books.

Cathy Goodwin, Ph.D.

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

Example 3:

<http://www.mrslieutenant.com/>

I reviewed this book quite some time ago and was pleasantly surprised to find myself enjoying a self-published fiction book. Phyllis Zimbler, the author, was a pre-viewer for this Report.

Phyllis also is listed as a recommended resource for Wordpress so she has the advantage of knowing the technology. The structure and copy, however, could be duplicated by any author.

Example 4:

http://www.pobronson.com/index_what_should_I_do_with_my_life.htm

Po Bronson of course is a best-selling author who has chosen to share a lot of information from his books. Each book listing includes a helpful summary, testimonials, sample chapters and more.

Example 5:

http://www.tonyaplank.com/novel_excerpt/i_think_therefore_i_cannot_swallow_1.html

Tonya Plank wants to emphasize her identity beyond being a first-time novelist. She has chosen to dedicate one page of her site directly to her book.

This choice works well. However, if you go this route, I recommend buying a dedicated “.com” URL, such as “mywonderfulbook.com” You can then forward this URL directly to the page in your website, making life easier for potential reviewers. Eventually you may choose to break out the site, as Phyllis Zimbler did for Mrs. Lieutenant.

Including an extract is not a bad idea, especially for a novelist. However, your summary needs to be fairly

comprehensive so reviewers know if they want to read your book.

Website Tip #1: If you can possibly afford the expense, hire a copywriter. As a minimum, get help with your book description.

Sure, you are a writer. But look at the sites of the best-sellers. I suspect they do not write their own website content, except for blogs and occasional articles.

Copywriting can be expensive. If you cannot afford a copywriter, draft your content and hire a copywriter for "copy coaching." I find that approach more effective than "tweaking."

Website Tip #2: Make your site readable. (Most of my example sites fit this category.) Use black type with a white background. Use large type.

Website Tip #3: Tell the whole story. If your memoir book includes a lot of self-help tips and advice, say so. If your how-to book is based on a strong religious or spiritual orientation, don't let the reviewer (and eventually your readers) find out around page 63.

➔ Remember that any effort you put into your site will benefit you, the author, in the long run. Reviewers will self-select more efficiently. You won't be sending review copies to reviewers who don't fit your book's target audience.

DO correspond directly with someone who reviews books in your field.

You won't have trouble finding email addresses. Many of us have websites or other identifying info in our profiles. If not, often you can google the name of the reviewer to find his or her website.

Frame your review request professionally.

Here's an example of a request I *actually received* from an author, with all the identifying details changed: author's name, topic, psychological process and URL. Otherwise it's word for word like this:

Dear Dr Cathy,

My book takes self-awareness and applies it to parenting troubled teens. Yes, this is possible! I'm new to publishing but that doesn't dampen my desire to have my book make a difference. I don't have a copy to send you. (Although I'm not above begging my publisher for a review copy if needed.) What I can offer is an electronic version, either PDF or online through upubmed.com

(sample at:

http://upubme.com/msmith/docs/troubledteens_excerpt?mode=embed&layout=http%3A%2F%2Fskin.upubme.com%2Fv%2Fdark%2Flayout.xml&showFlipBtn=true)

Kindly let me know if you have interest.

Best,

Mary

I felt sorry for the author. She didn't have to tell me she was new to publishing. She needed to buy a certain number of review copies (or negotiate for review copies in her contract). Frankly, I don't care how she gets her review copies; I just need to know if she has one for me.

She didn't have to tell me she wanted her book to make a difference. As a reviewer (and reader), I just want assurance that the book is good. "Making a difference" would be icing on the cake.

She didn't have to address me as "Dr. Cathy." These days most of the world is on a first-name basis. If she really wanted to use my title, call me "Dr. Goodwin." It's not a big deal, but details communicate professionalism.

Finally, you should never, *ever* send someone a URL that's 3 lines long! Get thee to a Link Shortener, such as tinyurl, budurl, or bit.ly.

Here's another example of a review request that doesn't work:

Would you be interested in reviewing my book? I am a first time writer and this is a book about my life which you can find out more by clicking on the link at the bottom. If so, please let me know if you would like me to send you the electronic version in htm or pdf or the book itself.

Well, I'm not impressed with the grammar mistakes in the request. This link turned out to lead to a long description of the book, with no indication of what the book might contribute to the reader. I probably wouldn't have bothered to click if I weren't working on this Report.

The most frustrating review requests go into a long story about why the author wrote the book. They include links to material that's completely irrelevant, such as songs and images.

Bottom Line: Think about the last time you bought a book or borrowed a book from your local library. Did you care why the author wrote the book? You might care about the author's qualifications and legitimacy, but a busy person doesn't have time to wonder if you are honoring someone's memory or scratching a psychic itch. For now, you have to think like a marketer.

Two **GOOD Examples** of Review Requests

Here are two examples of model request for reviews. I have permission to use the authors' real names and messages. One is for nonfiction and the other for fiction.

We noted that you reviewed *Emotional Freedom* by Orloff, *Iconoclast* by Berns, and *Positivity* by Fredrickson on Amazon.com. We recently published a book that is likely to appeal to similar audiences: *Reframing Change: How to Deal with Workplace Dynamics, Influence Others, and Bring People together to Initiate Positive Change*. You can check us out at www.leadingconsciously.com.

We will be glad to send you a complimentary copy if you might be interested in reading the book and posting an honest review of it on Amazon. You'll just need to send us your postal mailing address. There is, of course, no obligation.

We hope to hear from you. Thanks for considering our book.

Jean Kantambu Latting and V. Jean Ramsey

And for a fiction book request...

Dear Dr. Goodwin:

I recently published my first novel, *Swallow*. I found your profile on Amazon and, based on your reviews of other novels you have read, I thought you might like *Swallow*. It's about a young female Manhattan attorney who is at the start of her career, and receives a marriage proposal from her longtime boyfriend, only to become afflicted by a bizarre but not uncommon psychological disorder known as Globus Hystericus (or Globus Sensation), which makes it difficult for her to eat, then speak, and eventually even breathe. The book traces the protagonist's attempts to uncover the origins of her problem and overcome it.

I would love to send you a review copy if you would like. For more information, here is my Amazon page [link].

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Tonya Plank

DO tell the reviewer if your book has received favorable reviews...but be honest.

When I'm busy and a book sounds intriguing, often I'll hop over to Amazon to see what the reviews look like. Other reviewers probably do the same. However, if your book has received only 5-star, glowing reviews, your reviewer may become suspicious.

Author Tonya Plank included links to her Amazon listing as well as her own website when she sent her query. Her bio was well-written and intriguing. I was relieved when her book was good, too.

DO tell the reviewer if your book is self-published. A few reviewers won't review self-published books and it's better to know sooner rather than later. When you look through past reviews of any reviewer, you'll get a sense of whether they're biased against self-published books.

DO tell the reviewer if your book embodies religious or spiritual values. If you wrote a book about how you found God, it's a good idea to let readers and reviewers know that the plot twist is going to have strong religious overtones *before* they select your book to read or review.

For some readers and reviewers, that's a positive bonus. For others, it's like, "Um...what just happened here?"

If you want to convert your readers to a religious or spiritual view, then you're getting beyond the scope of this Report. I haven't a clue about how you would do that.

But if you want to sell your book, then you have to respect the realities. People usually buy books that

support their values. Occasionally they are curious about other people's religions and values. Either way, they don't like surprises. Let your reviewers know *before* they review your book.

For example, I often review books in the memoir or self-help. Occasionally, somewhere about two-thirds of the way through, the authors began writing about how getting religion changed their lives. I've actually read books classified as "business" that featured a blinding vision about two-thirds of the way through. In other books, the authors turned out to have a strong orientation to the Law of Attraction.

Some reviewers will go out of their way to read books with these themes. Others will go out of their way to *avoid* them.

→ Some people buy books they haven't read carefully to give as gifts to friends and business associates. Or they pass on a book they received themselves based on the cover description.

You can create a great deal of embarrassment for both the giver and the recipient when you bury a value-laden surprise somewhere around page 193. That's why I have no qualms about writing critical reviews of those books.

Religion isn't the only sensitive topic out there. If you've got any kind of issue – politics, alternative medicine, legal systems - warn the reader what's coming.

DO tell the reviewer what to do if she doesn't like the book or feels it's beyond her scope. For example:

"If you will send me your address, I will be pleased to send you a review copy. I want you to write a completely honest review. Even if you don't like the book, I would still welcome your review."

Or

"I realize you will review my book honestly. If you don't like the book, I ask you to pass it along to someone else without reviewing it."

➔ Some reviewers will ignore your request or refuse to review the book when you make this stipulation. Again, better to find out *before* you've sent copies of your book.

You sent the reviewer a brand-new hard copy of your book. Will she sell it to the used bookstore? Or will she sell it online, maybe even through the Amazon marketplace?

Possibly, especially if your book was published by a mainstream publisher.

But here's the hard truth. Reviewers don't get rich selling review copies. Usually they end up with a big collection of books that nobody wants.

If nobody wants a used book, your reviewer has to find a way to dispose of it. If she can't bear to toss it in the trash, she will probably donate her copy to the local public library, where it becomes part of the library's annual book sale. If it doesn't sell there, it's shredded.

Frankly, I think authors should be pleased when a reviewer sells books to a used book store. Your book has a better chance of getting noticed in a used book store than a "for sale" shelf of a public library...or even a dusty shelf of a library. The fact that your book can be sold means you're ahead of most books we get for review.

Your book could get into the hands of a buyer who loves it. She'll tell her friends and maybe even write a new review.

Maybe she will recognize your name when your next book appears.

I give my review copies to a library, most of the time. I feel virtuous but all too often the books get relegated to the Library Sale shelf. They would get much more attention at a quality used bookstore. In fact, if your book gets accepted by a used bookstore you are ahead of the pack.

Sometimes I give books as gifts. That's good for authors because more people will learn about the book. Most people at least go through the motions of reading a gift book and they'll give it a fair trial before selling it to a used bookstore or donating to *their* library.

The bottom line: Some authors and publishers waste entirely too much time wondering if reviewers are selling their books. They should be wondering whether their book will appeal to a market and generate sales. If your reviewer finds someone willing to buy your book, that's a *good* sign.

Will reviewers send your book back to you?

No. If this answer seems harsh, ask yourself, "Why should they?" You're the one who wanted the review! If you make this a condition, most reviewers will be too busy to wrap up the book and you can't expect them to pay postage. If you're concerned about losing your investment in the review copy, choose your reviewers with extra care.

Choose experienced reviewers.

Remember we walked through a book review earlier? We looked at "badges" below a reviewer's name.

Reviewers with badges that say Amazon 1000, Amazon 500 or Amazon 100 will be experienced. Their reviews get noticed. But they're also more likely to be critical.

Otherwise, they wouldn't have the credibility that earned all those "helpful" votes.

Are you sending out a series of review queries but not getting invitations to send your book for review? Or getting negative reviews that surprise you or seem off the mark? These outcomes suggest you may be targeting the wrong reviewers. Perhaps you believe your book belongs in one category or genre but reviewers see it differently.

Do you have a nonfiction book with a very narrow market? Turn it into a giveaway for speaking engagements and seminars. Reviewers are strangers who won't connect to you as an author. But audiences who just heard you speak may connect your text with their memory of the event.

The case for (and against) Vine reviewers.

Amazon recently departed from its purely egalitarian tradition by creating the Vine Program. You can't join Vine. You have to be invited. Nobody knows just how Vine reviewers are chosen; if you google "Amazon Vine program" you'll find much speculation on the topic from people who have entirely too much time on their hands.



As a Vine member, I get access to a monthly ezine listing books available for review. I can choose 2 or 3 books, depending on the month. These books are sent by regular USPS mail. Some arrive as review copies, others as published books.

The Vine program offers products, too. Once Amazon Vine offered cases of cat food. My two spoiled cats enjoyed high quality chicken dinners, packaged in small cans. We were

thrilled but I must admit I was challenged when it came time to write the review. One cat loved the food; the other turned up her nose and walked off. Finally I said exactly that.

When you see a reviewer identified as a “Vine Voice,” you know that reviewer’s quality has been recognized by the community. If your book is good, you might consider asking a “Vine Voice” to review it. I get requests every week.

No big deal. You just send emails as you would to any possible reviewer. However, there are two caveats.

First, these reviewers are busy. They’re reading as many as four or five books a month from Amazon. They may not accept the book or even respond to a query. If they do say yes, they may skim rather than read in detail.

But it’s worth a try, if you’re prepared to be patient. And you could get lucky: I’ve opened up a book, gotten enthused and turned around a review within days. At other times I’ve had a book on the back burner for months at a time.

Second, these reviewers don’t write puff pieces. Vine does not interfere with the review process in any way. These reviewers get asked to review a lot of books and some of them are extremely picky.

In fact, some authors and publishers have complained that the Vine program actually *hurts* authors because the reviewers are so tough. A Vine review often gets listed prominently, especially when a reviewer has access to an Advance Reading Copy (ARC). This means the review could be published before the book is available on the market and before other reviewers have access to the book.

In practice, a weak Vine review will get few helpful votes and will disappear to the bottom of the list. Non-Vine reviewers are not shy either. They’ll share their views about

your book and about other reviews as well. Over time you get a sense of how readers feel about a book. A negative review can be out-gunned and a positive review can get buried.

You can get a cynical view of the Vine program at http://www.weberbooks.com/2007/08/more-tidbits-on-amazon-vine-and_14.html

Publishers Weekly, a very reputable trade publication for authors and publishers, also commented on the Vine program. Unfortunately, they presented an article by someone who seemed to have a grudge against this program. If you do read this article, be sure to read the comments, which serve to correct some errors in this article.

<http://www.publishersweekly.com/article/CA6706026.html>

Can you get your book into the Vine program?

As a reviewer, I don't know too much about that side of the business. I believe you have to pay Amazon and you may have to work through a publisher. I've seen the number \$1500 per title associated with Vine reviews. In other words, your publisher pays \$75 - \$150 per review, if all the reviewers come through. Vine reviewers are required to review just 75% of the books they receive; if your book does not hold their interest, then some of this money gets wasted.

But if you are self-published and/or your publisher won't help, I wouldn't be concerned. I write reviews of books I get through purchase or through my local library, as well as Vine reviews. I also review many books that authors send me directly. Those reviews get just as much attention as Vine reviews.

Bottom Line: If you have a good, marketable book, and you follow the guidelines here, you will get reviews. I can't promise that reviews will turn into sales but you can probably get some very good reviews.

Can You Secretly Review Your Own Book?

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 can review a book only if you have purchased from Amazon. You might have two or three accounts, but you won't get far with those.

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. We will discuss this strategy below.

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

What makes a genuine 5-star review?

Obviously there's no single formula across genres and reviewers. But here's what I've noticed among genuine 5-star reviews – not puff pieces.

Most important: Regardless of genre, reviewers praise books that keep readers turning pages. You'll see phrases like, "I couldn't put this one down." Or "It was a fast read."

Suspense calls for smooth, professional writing. That's why books by journalists usually do well. Holding the reader's interest will make up for a multitude of flaws.

Non-fiction "How to" and "Self Help:" As a frequent consumer and reviewer of these books, I've detected several things reviewers look for.

- The best books have a unifying theme or premise that gets incorporated in all the chapters. One of the best examples is Martha Beck's [*Finding Your Own North Star*](#). Dr. Beck argues that your body serves as your internal compass, so you can listen to your own feelings as well as physical pain. Every chapter represents a development of the premise.
- Self-help reviewers want original content. One of the most common criticisms of self-help books is, "Nothing new." If you write a time management book, the reviewers (and readers) won't get excited when you suggest breaking down a task into manageable chunks. We've heard it all before.
- Self-help reviewers want consistency of content and target audience. For instance, a book on medical self-help should be targeted to ordinary patients. Readers will get frustrated if you lecture them on "what government needs to do about the medical system."
- Reviewers also want to believe the title and book cover material are not misleading. When someone else publishes your book, you may have little or no control over title and cover artwork. If you do have any sort of control, focus on consistency.
 - I reviewed a book called *The Accidental Millionaire*. The problem was, there was nothing accidental about that millionaire! She was

planning and strategizing every step of the way. Anyway, I reasoned, if her success was accidental, what advice does she have for readers?

- That book was published with a strong marketing campaign. But success didn't last. Readers (and reviewers) always know.

Mysteries: Mystery readers are among the most discerning and the most critical. They're highly sophisticated; smart authors won't talk down to these audiences. Read Robert Parker's Spenser series (especially the early volumes) and you'll see that he assumes readers have sophisticated tastes in books, clothes and even furniture.

- Reviewers want a strong plot but they also want memorable, 3-dimensional characters. They're very critical of books that telegraph endings. They value plausibility.
- Mysteries come in sub-genres: cozy, suspense, amateur sleuth, police procedural and more. When you choose a reviewer, be sensitive to their tastes. I am an avid mystery fan, for instance, but I avoid horror, thriller and vampire sub-genres.

Memoir is a popular but demanding genre. Most people have a story. But memoir writing calls for special tools and techniques.

- Memoir requires the author to do more than simply recount a life story. Reviewers and readers of memoir want the author to make meaning out of his or her life. We want to know, "Why did he live that way? Was the ending inevitable?"
- Reviewers will comment on the author's life as well as the writing and structure. You need a *very* thick skin.

→ For example: A movie critic, took his son out of high school for a year. The father and son watched movies together and analyzed them, as a way of initiating dialogue. Parents, teachers and mental health professionals were quick to diagnose the son's problem and very critical of the father. (I liked the book and applauded the father's decision. But of course I am not a parent.)

→ Another example can be seen in Walter Kirn's memoir of his high school and college life, [Lost in the Meritocracy](#). Kirn is the author of a well-received fiction book, *Up In The Air*. This book was made into a movie that (as I write today) has Oscar potential, according to many movie critics.

Reviewers were unusually divided for this book, spread almost evenly across all five possible star ratings. Many of the comments related to Kirn's life and his decision to write the book at all.

Be especially careful about mixing genres.

As a copywriter, I sometimes get asked to write promotional sales letters for books. The first question I ask is, "What is the genre of the book?"

If you haven't considered this question before you wrote the book, you may have difficulty promoting your book. Book stores and reviewers want to categorize your book, even if you don't.

One author told me, "I chose to self-publish precisely because my book blurs the line between memoir and self-help. The agents and publishers wouldn't touch it."

Hello! That's a wake-up call. You're free to self-publish anything you want. But be prepared to live with the consequences.

For some reason, a surprising number of authors try to report their life stories, and then draw lessons for readers. This pattern occurs even in books that are not self-published.

Those books rarely do well. Readers get frustrated and reviewers rarely give them glowing reviews.

In fact, reviewers don't even like self-help books that incorporate too much detail from the author's own life.

Example: One author wrote a book of advice for women who wanted to break out of the box and create powerful careers. She shared details of her background, including some risky maneuvers, scandals, and romantic interludes with corporate presidents.

Many of the reviews were scathing. The reviewers felt these details were irrelevant and inappropriate. They disapproved of the woman's choices. (I liked the book but was in a minority.)

Reviewers don't like surprises. Genres help readers and reviews know what to expect. When an author surprises the reader in the wrong way, reviewers will be especially critical. What's implied (and often stated outright) is the idea, "I wouldn't have picked up this book if I had known..."

These days, reading time is limited. We don't want to get halfway through a book before we realize it's not what we expected.

Mixing genres or presenting a book in the wrong genre is a common surprise that is guaranteed to annoy reviewers. For

instance, through the Vine program, I read Kathleen Norris's book *Acedia*, which was promoted as a memoir. Memoir is one of my favorite genres. To my surprise, this book turned out to be less of a memoir than a series of spiritual essays.

I reviewed the book because of the Vine requirement but I was a little nervous. Kathleen Norris is an established author and I am always concerned about commenting on sensitive topics. Luckily, this review received many "helpful" votes, which suggests that other readers felt the same way about mixing genres.

For yet another example, take a look at a book by Perry Binder, [Unlocking Your Rubber Room](#). See <http://bit.ly/rubroom>. The author, a law professor, has some fascinating insights into teaching and the legal profession. I enjoyed reading it. But if you look at my review, you will see that I didn't know how to classify the book. It's positioned as light-hearted and maybe even self-help, but many of the 44 "lessons" are not light at all. Some of them aren't even lessons.

Before you conclude that I'm crotchety and hard to please (and I won't argue too hard if you do), look at the prices. The book's market price is \$12.95 but you can buy several new copies for nearly half price, \$7.95. The book's rank was around 490,000 less than a year after the book was published.

The author is an excellent writer. He's got great content. I actually enjoyed reading much of the book and would give it as a gift if I could just figure out who would enjoy reading it. I would say the low rank is due entirely to mixing genres.

Choose reviewers by genre – not subject.

For example, reviewers who like memoir or biography may review books about political or religious figures. That doesn't

mean they will want to read books about politics or religion. Memoir readers are fascinated by life stories. If you're not sure, it's best to be completely honest in your query.

Forty 5-star reviews and a sales rank of 600,000.

Ouch! Getting many book reviews can be a big plus for your book sales, but you need to understand what kind of reviews will actually sell your book.

For instance, one book collected over 40 five-star reviews. I am tempted to name the book but the author has enough problems. I don't even have the heart to write the negative review the book deserves.

The author has a compelling premise. His site is quite good: his own story definitely got my interest. But let's look more closely.

What is this book's genre? From the reviews, it's hard to tell whether he wrote a memoir or an advisory book for corporate leaders.

The book's premise was compelling. The author began life as a juvenile delinquent, constantly in trouble with the police. Now he's a highly successful executive. He becomes frustrated when people say, "It's hard to change."

So what went wrong?

Even the New York Times best-sellers don't get 100% 5-star reviews. I might believe a dozen or so, but...forty?

So I looked at the reviewers' names. None were ranked reviewers. I clicked on a few names, only to find that they had never written an Amazon review before. A few had written just one or two reviews of products that were not at all similar to this book.

➔When you see a collection of first-time reviewers, you're most likely looking at a group of the authors' friends.

The Amazon community is smart. This combination – no ranked reviewers, all 5-star reviews – will raise red flags.

The author sent me this book for review. It's got some riveting passages, but includes a common self-published fatal flaw: combining genres of memoir and self-help. As often happens, the memoir section is fascinating while the self-help seems unnecessary. The author throws a spiritual curve two-thirds of the way through, without warning the reader. For me, that's a fatal flaw.

Other ways to get reviewed

Of course Amazon isn't the only place to get reviewed. Here are some other options.

Are these reviews real?

Suppose someone comes up to you at a meeting or sends you a email, asking for a review copy. You find yourself wondering, "Is this person really a reviewer? Will they actually review my book?"

I've been told that scam artists exist in this field:

they'll ask for your book just to get review copies. Frankly, I suspect the numbers are small. Experienced reviewers are drowning in books.

When you meet someone at a conference or networking event, never hand over a hard copy of your book. Ask potential reviewers for their names and contact information. When you get home, google them. Look them up on Amazon. If they don't seem to fit or you can't find them, you can quietly ignore the request. There is no

reason to write and explain. **You are under no obligation to send anyone a book for review**, unless you have some kind of legal contract that's beyond our scope here.

If nothing else, you may save books and postage. A reviewer may find it harder to say "no" in person. That's happened to me: I agreed to review a book, then got that sinking feeling when the author handed me the book a few hours later. I knew the book would be problematic...and it was. If the author had queried me later, I'd have said no.

When a reviewer agrees to review a book and then does nothing, don't assume you are dealing with a scam artist. She may have gotten busy. He may have hated your book and didn't want to give you a bad review. Whenever you hand over a book, you take a chance that the outcome will be negative.

Prepublication and Editorial Reviews:

Your book may get a prepublication review from Publishers' Weekly, Kirkus Review or a similar directory of reviews. Publishers typically submit all books to those directories. When you self-publish you will most likely have to do this yourself.

You can google "Kirkus Review Submissions," "Publishers Weekly Submissions," and similar topics related to the directory where you want to be listed. The guidelines change from time to time, so use the Internet rather than a printed source.

If your book was reviewed in one of those sources, make sure the review gets published on Amazon. Amazon has licenses (I'm told) to reprint those reviews in their entirety. These reviews will be shown as "Editorial Reviews."

Editorial reviews will help introduce your book before the first customer reviews appear. Once customers (including Amazon's hard-core reviewers) begin reviewing your book, readers may not pay much attention to editorial reviews.

Other Review Sites

Besides Amazon and B&N, you will find other book review sites scattered all over the Internet. You can google "book reviews" and "review my book." Most of these sites will turn out to be blogs.

For example, see

<http://booknookclub.blogspot.com>

and

<http://www.goodreads.com/>

Some of these sites will allow you to submit your book for review. For others, you might consider asking someone who genuinely liked your book to submit a review.

These sources won't have the power of Amazon because they don't have the audience. If you get a glowing review, you can add it to your website pages, which may give you credibility with more readers and reviewers.

However, a glance at these reviews will tell you that these folks might be even fussier than the Amazon reviewers. You're also dealing with wild cards because most don't have track records so you can anticipate their reactions to your book.

Media Reviews:

Let's say your book was reviewed in your local paper. Amazon will publish a summary. Last time I checked the

limit was 20 words. These reviews add credibility for some audiences.

➔ Do not publish the summary as your own review. Look up Amazon's process (which will probably change by the time you read this).

Sometimes a newspaper or magazine will submit the review as a customer review. In other words, an editor or reviewer will just write a review and identify herself as a representative of a publication. That way you get the best of both worlds (if it's a good review): credibility of a recognized source combined with easy access for readers who browse through the customer reviews.

Friends, family and fans:

When someone sends you a nice note about your book, be sure to ask for an Amazon review. Family and friends can add credibility with well-written reviews.

But I'd be a little careful. Reviews identifying your reviewer as the author's mother or sister will not do much for sales because readers will discount their value. Tell your friends to be honest and to identify at least a few quibbles when they write reviews.

You can also encourage them to buy my info product: [Boost Business With Amazon Book Reviews.](http://www.BoostBusinessWithBookReviews.com)
<http://www.BoostBusinessWithBookReviews.com>

An amusing side note: Check out the reviews for Martha Beck's book, [Leaving The Saints](#). (Yes, that's the same Martha Beck who wrote the career book I recommended earlier as a model for nonfiction.) One reviewer identifies himself as Martha's ex-husband and he's quite critical. This book drew lots of controversy when it was published; I suspect John's comments actually may have helped sales.

These comments were still there when I visited the site in early 2010. Just be warned: the reviews of this book are fascinating and controversial. It's easy to get distracted here.

Other authors' signing events

Reviewers are readers and sometimes they'll go to a bookstore or library to hear authors speak. I once was waiting in line to get a book signed by Natalie Goldberg when the woman behind me started talking about her forthcoming book. I offered to review it for her. She sent me a copy and luckily I liked the book.

Natalie Goldberg's book was about writing memoir, one of my favorite genres. Naturally the event attracted memoir writers.

Book conferences might also be a good place to find reviewers, if only because so many reviewers are also writers. I wouldn't suggest that you go to a writers' conference just to find reviewers, but I would suggest that you be prepared if you stumble across one. Get their cards and follow up later.

Get Noticed On Amazon

Once you get a few credible, positive reviews, you may want to attract more traffic to your book. Here are three ways.

First, Amazon allows anyone to compile lists of books on a topic. These "Listmania" lists appear when any book on the list shows up on a page. Now you can develop a strategy.

Put together a list of your top 5, 7 or 10 books on the same topic as your book. Make sure your list includes best-selling authors. Go ahead and add your own book to the list.

Your Listmania list will appear when Amazon visitors search for the best-selling authors' books. Some curious visitors will click on your list, where they will see your book.

In other words, readers will find your book while they're searching for best-sellers. It's like putting up a billboard on a busy highway.

Caution: Make sure your book reaches the same target market as the other books on your list. If you have a book on ADHD among teens, you won't get much traction from a list that includes books on other teen problems, such as bullying or bulimia.

You can also compile a list of "So you want to..." books. For instance, you could have a list of books on, "So you want to be a published author..." This opportunity seems to be just another variation of the Listmania option.

Second, Amazon allows you as an author to tag your books. That's good because you can identify helpful keywords your readers will use to find your book. You can also present a bio and a blog on Amazon. Many authors are doing it but I'm not sure it's helpful unless you are already a big name. Still, it can't hurt. I tend to read those bios after I read the book itself, not before. It may be a good way to build relationships with your audience for future books.

Third, begin to review other books, especially books targeted to the same audience as your book. Just be careful about getting snarky with the competition. Even if you're right, you lose credibility. You may get flagged and then your review will be deleted altogether.

Three Reasons Why Authors Should Also Be Reviewers

Before soliciting reviews, I recommend that you review a few books yourself. In fact, I recommend writing reviews

Cathy Goodwin, Ph.D.

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

while you are working on your own book (or next book, if this one is finished). Here's why.

Reason #1: You will get publicity for your own book. Let's say you wrote a book about raising children. You might decide to review a best-selling book on child psychology, such as Mel Levine's *The Myth of Laziness*.

Many people will read reviews of Levine's book. (I liked his book myself and I don't even have kids.) They will see your review. They may be motivated to look up your book.

Reason #2: You will understand the review process when you ask others to review. You get a sense of how a stranger looks at a new book, as compared to the way a friend or family member looks at the same book.

Reason #3: When a friend, family member or fan offers to write a review, say thank you and follow up with some coaching. Many well-meaning friends and family members inadvertently go overboard with praise, trying to help you. As we have seen, their efforts will backfire.

But...how do you review a book? I recommend that you read through the next section even if you have no intentions of reviewing a book. You'll get insights into the reviewer's mind.

If you want more information on how to review books to promote your professional services and drive traffic to your website, see my ebook [Book Reviews For Professionals](#). It's not inexpensive because it's designed to help solo professionals get more clients. I made thousands of dollars from book reviews and attempt to share the method.

Here's a shorter version, tailored for authors.

Step-By-Step Overview of Writing Your Review

- (1) Make sure you have purchased something from Amazon. Only buyers are allowed to write reviews.
- (2) Choose a book that might be read by your target market. The best way to do this:
 - Amazon lets you search for people, books, other categories or even the whole store. Choose a search on "books."
 - Enter keywords and title words to pull up books that might be read by readers of your book. For instance, if you are writing to parents of troubled teens, choose terms like "teenagers," "adolescents," and maybe even "troubled teenagers." You could also look for terms like "anorexia" and "juvenile delinquency."
 - Rank the search results by popularity. Your time will be best rewarded when you review popular books, because those books get the most attention from readers.
- (3) Write a review in a text format (such as Notepad for the PC or TextWrangler for the Mac).
- (4) 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.



- (5) Paste your review into the space provided. You will be asked to create a title for the review and to rank the book with stars.
- (6) Click "submit." You'll be warned if you forget a step.
- (7) You will get a chance to preview your review. I would re-read at this point because it's easy to find embarrassing bloopers. Once I wrote "The style of righting is very good..."

Tip: You can write your review in Word first (and use the Word spell-checker program). But do NOT paste directly from Word into the Amazon review area. First paste your Word doc into a program such as Notepad (or TextWrangler for the Mac) to strip out the code invisible to humans but very visible to the software. Then copy that "stripped" document into the Amazon review area.

- (8) Click on "Submit" again. Your review may take awhile to appear.
- (9) Create your reviewer profile while you wait for your review to appear. Reference your website or blog and be sure to refer to the book you wrote.
- (10) Write more reviews.
- (11) If your reviews don't appear within 48 hours, make sure you didn't inadvertently include something to get banned. Reviews do get lost so go ahead and re-submit.
- (12) Keep an eye on your comments and helpful votes. You won't get a good sense of what's happening till you have many reviews out there.

How to Write Your Review: Guidelines.

Here is a summary of the site's guidelines, in my own words, as well as tips based on my own experience. However, be aware that policies change. I am not an official representative of Amazon. Here's what I *think* they want.

(1) Amazon recommends 75-300 words, with a maximum of 1000.

In practice, longer reviews can get more attention. I suggest aiming for 300-400 words or more if the book seems to be interesting to your target market. You may be able to go even longer if you're writing a thoughtful review.

(2) Stay focused on the book.

If you digress from the book, Amazon will cut out the irrelevant parts or kill the review altogether. Once I didn't and Amazon removed the paragraphs they considered irrelevant, replacing them with the ellipsis "...". They were right. You can't take these things personally.

Consider saying something like, "The author of the book says X, but I disagree...."

You can probably refer readers to other books on Amazon. You can say, "Compared to Book X, this book is..." I mention other Amazon books all the time in my own reviews and so far have come through unscathed.

(3) 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. 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.

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. Her book is brilliant; her Chapter 3 could be used in a graduate statistics course.

But apparently Amazon doesn't care. And they've got a point. We can draw an analogy to movie previews: a reader of reviews might not have the same sensibilities as a reader of the book.

The policy on 4-letter words seems to be official. But there seems to be an unwritten rule about reviewing books that relate to the author's own tragedy. Once I was critical of a book written by a cancer patient. All the other reviewers were 5-star. My review quietly disappeared. Since then, I've noticed that negative reviews of books on certain topics draw the wrath of readers and reviewers.

Review at your own risk. And if you're an author, be aware that reviewers may be reluctant to be honest, which means they may not review your book at all.

(4) Keep a copy of your review on your own computer until you see it appear...and maybe afterward.

Every so often Amazon makes a processing error. It's rare, but it happens. Or your own computer can hiccup just after you finish a review but before you click "submit." (It's happened to me.) Everything you wrote, including all your last-minute edits and changes, disappear forever into a hole that's deeper than the Amazon River.

Occasionally a review even disappears after it's submitted and you think it's accepted. So it's best to keep a copy of your review on your computer so you won't have to start over. Use a text file (such as Notepad or TextWrangler) rather than Word so you'll avoid bizarre characters appearing in your review.

(5) 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 Scottoline'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.

I wouldn't worry about keywords in the headline. The reason is that readers won't come to Amazon because they want to read your review. They're interested in the book. It's up to the author to create buzz to draw traffic. You can add your own tags to the review.

Must You Read Every Word of Every Book You Review?

You need to read enough to write an ethical review. Sometimes reviewers will write, "I must admit I skimmed the last chapters and may have missed this point..."

You will lose credibility if you fault the author for omitting something important, only to realize it was right there on page 25, or even page 3!

However, when you're doing research on the competition, you may just sink into a comfortable chair at Borders or B&N with a cappuccino and a stack of books. You would read just enough to write a capable, honest, ethical review. After awhile you learn to skim.

In fact, practicing the "quick skim" method will help you become a better writer. You realize that readers don't always hang on every word so you make it easy for them to dig out the important points. You also realize the need for maintaining suspense and holding the reader's interest, regardless of genre. Most important, when you skim several books quickly, you get a sense of what readers expect from your particular genre or type of book.

After Your Review Is Published

Amazon now allows readers to comment on your reviews, presumably to create a sense of community. Comments will get read and you may get additional publicity. I recommend (as noted earlier) commenting only on reviews of other people's books. Leave your own reviews alone.

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. Readers can be vicious.



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."

If you have time, it's nice to write a comment about a reviewer. It adds to the community feeling Amazon seems to be aiming for. But you won't get the impact you get from commenting on a blog post or Facebook note. You don't get any kind of trackbacks and it's easy to ignore comments.

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.

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. I have some embarrassing spelling bloopers out there because I'm not willing to lose the "helpful" votes.

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.

➔ As an author, you'll understand why reviewers will be less than thrilled when you ask them to make changes. They lose votes and, frankly, it's a hassle.

One of the strangest requests I ever received as a reviewer came from the author's relative. The author wrote a memoir of her troubled childhood, with frequent references to her brother. Apparently her brother had a more difficult time dealing with the family's challenges, but finally was adopted by a loving family.

The brother's adoptive father tracked me down and sent me an email, urgently asking me to delete mention of the brother. He claimed the author's brother, already bearing emotional scars, would be upset by my review.

I hadn't received any votes and my comments about the brother weren't essential, so I changed one sentence. The book wasn't in one of my primary reviewing areas and the brother was not featured prominently.

In looking back, I'm not sure that was a good idea. When you sign releases to be mentioned in a book (and they had), you give up control. Your beef is with the author, not the reviewer.

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.

I believe Amazon does not allow you to mention names of other booksellers. So don't begin your review with, "I purchased my book from Barnes & Noble..." or, "I got this book from another review site..."

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>

As an author, you can certainly refer to your writing and to your own book. These days you can include a URL that links to the book's sales page rather than your home page. If Amazon allows this practice when you finish your own book, I would recommend that you also send readers to your book's page.

In keeping with the community ideal, you even get a place to record your interests. Keep your interests consistent with the image you are promoting.

I haven't done anything with Friends, although I've accepted 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. Just don't anticipate an alternative to Facebook. I believe Amazon has been phasing out this option so the point may be moot by the time you read this Report.

Reveal yourself.

As I review books, I use phrases like, "As a career consultant, I..." And I might refer to "my clients." In my profile, I let readers know where to find me and my website.

As an author, here's your chance to motivate readers to come to your website. If you've chosen your books carefully, you write reviews for books that compete with yours.

Your bio will be seen by dozens – perhaps hundreds or thousands – of people who are potential readers of your own book. Who knows? They may like your book better than the one you are reviewing.

How to use the website link in your bio.

These days you are allowed to use a complete link to a website in your bio. Therefore you need to think about where you are directing visitors. You might have a special website that promotes your book, with a powerful home page.

Some authors do not define themselves by their writing. They sell products or offer services to clients. If you fit this profile, create a web page that summarizes your professional offerings.

➔ Don't be surprised if this page turns out to be a strong selling tool. You may find readers resonate with your writing in a powerful way. They will send queries about your services. Therefore, spend some time and effort creating your landing page, i.e., the page where your visitors will "land" after they visit your bio and click on the URL you provide. Even if you are an author you may need some help writing copy for your site.

➔ Don't try to sneak your URL into your review.

Some Amazon reviewers use their site as part of their logon names. Or they sign reviews with an abbreviated version of their website. I've tried doing this a couple of times:

Cathygoodwin (.com)

Most of the time these obvious ploys backfire. Amazon replaces them with the 3-dot ellipsis. I think the community rejects the most blatant selling techniques.

Instead, you can spend time on your reviewer profile. Many reviewers don't bother but you have a nice opportunity to introduce yourself to thousands of readers under very favorable conditions.

The rewards of reviewing: Tangible and Intangible

Amazon Reviewer Rank: Good for the Ego

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, mix in some secret criteria and get a score. This number will be your numerical rank. Nobody knows exactly how Amazon computes ranking and (from what I read here and there) the formulas keep changing.

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. It doesn't mean there are 499 people ahead of me. Because so many people write reviews, the numbers show a lot of ties.

You won't get paid for writing reviews (and you won't get rewarded for reaching higher rank). But you will get credibility and attention. I get subscribers to my virtual

newsletters and sometimes clients. And I get books...oh, do I get books!

Free Books: The Reviewer's Perspective

Authors don't always realize that reviewers are inundated with 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. That's why I think every author should be a reviewer first.

If you start getting requests for reviewing books, I recommend posting a policy. Here's mine:

<http://www.copy-cat-copywriting.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."

Now you see why I think authors need to be reviewers. When you've got a few boxes of books in your attic, you'll realize why reviewers aren't jumping up and down to review your own tightly-niched book.



Section III: Attracting Readers To Your Book With Reviews

When you want to attract readers to your own book, here are a few strategies.

Target books your audience will be reading.

Here's where planning pays off. When you followed my suggestion to write a book proposal, you identified your competition.

Are any competitors best-sellers? You already noted those books when you prepared your proposal. Now that your book is available, go back and review those books. Identify yourself as an author in the review.

For instance, suppose you wrote a book targeting parents of troubled teens. Head right to Amazon and search on "troubled teens." You'll see a button on the right, "Sort by..." with a drop-down menu. Choose "Publication Date." It's important to know what people are reading now.

When I searched, one result featured a book about adopted children. If your book applies to adopted children, you've got a whole new category of books to review.

But I wouldn't stop there. What other search terms can you think of? I tried, "Parents of Teens." When books appeared, I looked at each book's sales ranking. I also noted, "People who bought this book also bought..."

Your goal is to identify the best-selling books in your genre. "Parenting Teens with Love and Logic" ranked much higher than "An Owners' Manual of Adolescents" when I

checked last. So you'd prioritize reviews of "Parenting Teens With Love and Logic."

Compile a list of these high-selling books that you can buy or read in the library. You might also consider visiting a bookstore to skim each book, as we discussed earlier.

If you go to a live bookstore, don't just peruse the shelves and choose books on the spur of the moment. Have a plan when you walk in the door. Go to Amazon first and focus on the most popular books, as we discussed with the "steps."

Showcase your expertise.

As you review a book, you can describe your credentials to demonstrate your expertise. 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. You can also refer to your own book.

You can also identify yourself when you comment on other reviews. However, it's probably not a good idea to say, "My book was so much better..." You will come across as credible when you write something like:

"As the author of [Book X], I researched this topic. My findings gave me a different perspective from the author of Book Y, which I am reviewing now. For example..."

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

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

The earliest reviews on a book tend to get the most “helpful” votes simply because readers are looking for help. They’re trying to decide whether to buy a book 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 actually brought me some business. My review was the Spotlight Review for Po Bronson’s book, *What Should I Do With My Life*. As you saw, 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 got results.

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 journalists, 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.

Target controversial books.

You'll attract like-minded readers 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.

Controversial books attract interest from readers, who actually read the reviews. Your name will be noticed.

Create some controversy even if the book doesn't.

Sometimes I'll share my own skepticism. For example, when reviewing a book about life 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. That's gotten me some snide comments but also some ezine subscribers and nice supportive responses.

Write comments on other people's reviews.

Look up Kirn's book, *Up In The Air*, a best-selling book that later became a movie. One author leveraged this book's popularity for his own purposes. He wrote a comment on *someone else's* review of this book. In his comment, he refers to "The eight years of research that it took for me to write my book 'Layoffs & Hope' and my own personal experience as a manager and employee...."

That author was smart. He found a subtle way to introduce himself and his book to an audience that shows an interest in reading books on this topic. However, he may find it's a bit of a stretch. *Up In The Air* is a novel while his book was memoir. Readers care about the difference.

You probably will get more exposure from a review rather than a comment. If you don't have a chance to do the review, though, a comment is a possible alternative.

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.

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 Internet 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, at most.

Let's say Mary clicks through your link to go to Amazon. A few hours later she goes to Bob's site and clicks through his

link. Your link no longer has value. For the next day or two, all Mary's purchases get credited to Bob for commissions.

Once your book has been published and earned a favorable review or two...

Join Amazon's Author Central Program.

If your book is listed on Amazon, you are probably eligible to join the Author Central Program. You get an author page, visibility and many benefits. The Program changes and evolves so I recommend you just google Amazon Author Central if you believe you are eligible. To be honest, I am not sure these opportunities translate into books that are sold.

Three Ways To Supplement Your Reviews

Marketing Strategy #1: Twitter, Facebook and Other Social Media

These media offer a way for you to introduce yourself to a large, targeted market. Open an account and start posting. Target your prospects and tweet on topics related to your book.

For instance, if your book is directed to parents of troubled teens, you can post and tweet

- ✓ tips and ideas related to parenting
- ✓ links to online articles these readers might like (such as articles in the New York Times)
- ✓ comments on news stories and popular media relating to families
- ✓ humorous stories from your own family

If you do a good job, readers will be intrigued by your posts. They click on your name. Your bio will include a statement

that you are the author of a book, with a link to the book's sales page, your author website or the Amazon listing for your book.

To learn more about social marketing, I offer a relatively inexpensive home study course – a multimedia product based on a teleseminar workshop I taught live. I go into much more detail about choosing target markets and writing posts. You can learn more at

<http://www.SocialMarketingPower.com>

Your social media posts may also attract reviewers.

I've actually offered to review books when I see discussions on social media. Of course, you can specifically say, "Looking for reviewers." Just be careful to explain that you don't want a puffy, glowing review. You probably won't attract the busiest, most experienced reviewers (although you might). It's better to demonstrate the book's appeal with interesting posts and blog entries.

You can leverage your reviews with social media posts. You can even post or tweet, "Just got a great review for my book on Amazon!" with a shortened link to the review.

When posting or tweeting, remember that everything happens fast. You might post at 9 AM and again at 9:15, only to realize that most readers will get over 100 posts in between. Don't be afraid to post multiple times with slightly different versions of your post or tweet. You can use tweetlater to space your posts evenly.

Marketing Strategy #2: Go on a Blog Book Tour.

The best way to supplement your reviews without leaving home: go on a blog book tour. Tim Ferriss of Four Hour Workweek fame did this to promote his book. He created a best seller without signing a single autograph or making a

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

single bookstore appearance (as far as I know). Of course, he didn't turn down opportunities to appear on the Today show and other major broadcasts, as an established author.

Begin by entering the blogosphere with your own blog.

Getting started:

This article contains an excellent summary of blogs and blogging. Even if you are experienced with blogs, you may learn some new information:

<http://www.internetwritingjournal.com/nov05/cew4.htm>

Do not use blogger.com or wordpress.com, for two reasons.

First, you have little control over the appearance of your site. On top of your blogger.com blog, you will see a link inviting your visitors to check out another blogger.com blog. Who knows...the next blog could be a competitor or a porn site.

Second, you need to host your own blog. Otherwise your blog can be suspended arbitrarily for a few days or more. Not exactly the impression you want to make!

If you already are set up with a blogger.com blog, don't panic. It's easy to transfer your entire blog and you won't lose even a single comment.

My recommendations:

Use Wordpress.org and get a reputable host. For less than \$10 a month you can host *all* your domains and sites at BlueHostConnections. <http://budurl.com/goblue>. This site offers 24/7 live customer service (never accept anything

less). Your Wordpress blog will float to the Internet almost effortlessly with this system.

You can also use Typepad. Typepad is easier to set up and maintain if you are willing to work with what they have. However, if you need help, you will pay more and find fewer resources to help. You pay a monthly fee for Typepad to host your blog.

Using the Blogosphere to Promote Your Blog

There are 3 ways to use blogs to promote your book.

First, create a blog and attract traffic. Use keywords in headlines and in your post. Post at least 3-4 times a week to get value from this blog. Blogs derive much of their value from fresh, changing content; you lose this advantage if you post once a week or less.

Some successful marketers post one strong, viral post each week, with many social marketing and ezine mentions to direct readers to that post. This approach works well if you already have a fairly strong following so you can announce the posts.

Second, visit other people's blogs and write comments on relevant topics. You will almost always have an opportunity to link back to your website or blog.

Third, offer to be a guest blogger. You can simply type into google, "Guest blogger wanted [topic]." For example, if you are a family counselor or divorce lawyer, you could try, "Guest blogger wanted divorce."

You can also check out Cathy Stucker's website:

<http://www.bloggerlink.com>

Currently you can use this site free to search for guest blogging gigs as well as guest bloggers for your own blog. You can post your availability and you may get responses.

If you want to write guest posts, be prepared for experienced blog owners who will be *extremely* fussy. For example, if you type my name into any search engine, you will see my articles are everywhere. Yet I was challenged when I presented a post idea to a blog owner. He claimed he found this idea on the Internet.

There are few truly original, unexplored areas, especially in popular fields. You have to be prepared to argue your case and/or come up with truly original ideas.

Personally, I get frustrated myself when blog owners demand uniqueness, i.e., they want to retain "all rights" to the post content in return for visibility. That's fine if they have a huge audience in your target market. Otherwise, it's a lot of work for just one post.

Frankly, I don't get it. I post my own articles to my blog. I have posted other people's articles to my blogs and drawn a terrific response from my own readers. After all, the guests are strangers to my "peeps" and it's unlikely that my readers have seen this content before. But you have to follow the rules of the blog owner. I would insist on the right to re-use the post 30 days or less after it appears as a guest post.

If you are selling a virtual product with a reasonable affiliate commission, some marketers will allow you to write a post if you include their affiliate link. In other words, the host gets a commission when visitors buy your product. For instance, Eric Gruber posted on my blog. You can [go here to see his guest post](#).

If you click on the links at the bottom and you ultimately buy Eric's products, I will get a commission. But that's not why I invited Eric to write this guest post. I knew his products were good and I knew my readers would like this topic. A post on the Law of Attraction or relationships would not be appropriate for my readers.

You can also invite others to write guest posts on your blog.

Blog owners typically invite guests because they want to expose their readers to a wider range of content. They want to keep adding content without (let's face it) writing a gazillion more posts themselves.

As an author, however, your blog offers an unparalleled opportunity to display your own writing. Therefore, I would invite only guest bloggers who have visibility, because they will draw traffic to your blog. You might also invite guests who will promote their posts to their own subscribers. Here's how it might work.

Marci Alboher and Penelope Trunk are extremely well-known bloggers in the field of careers and career change. Let's say you are a career coach and you found a way to get them to write a guest blog. (Very unlikely: I don't think they offer guest posts.) Readers frequently google their names and, in the process, might come across your blog. Additionally, they may reference your blog post in their own writings ("Recently I guested on the Great Career website and I said...")

Getting high-visibility guests is a long shot and any effort to invite them will probably waste time.

However, many high profile marketers will allow you to post *their* articles on your blog as long as you include their resource boxes with live links. You get many of the same benefits because the search engines might pick up your blog

instead of the original source. On the rare occasions I use someone else's article in my blog, site or ezine, I usually write to ask permission even if the guidelines are posted, just to be sure I won't alienate a prospective professional ally.

However, if you don't want to invest time and energy negotiating with high-impact guests on your blog, you often get similar results just by discussing their posts. When you write a post about a well-known author or a popular TV show, you will get traffic to your site. I've gotten comments on posts that referenced the PBS series *Carrier* and the NBC reality show *Apprentice*. A career coach could certainly include discussions of the Parachute book or the Brazen Careerist, with links to the source.

This article (a blog post, actually!) goes into the arcane etiquette of guest posting:

<http://bit.ly/7xCAXG>

Here are just a few links to get started. Be aware that (as always) links are subject to change. In addition to these links, just google "blog book tour."

http://quickest.blogbooktourguide.ever.com/?skip_login=1

<http://blogbooktours.blogspot.com/2007/11/blog-book-tour-in-retrospect.html>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/02/fashion/02blog.html>

If you're too busy writing your next book, some consultants are available to arrange a blog tour for you. For example, Nikki Leigh can arrange blog tours in some book categories.

<http://www.nikkileigh.com>

I don't know Nikki but have heard her speak on a virtual teleseminar. She has been highly recommended.

For your own Internet ventures, check out:

<http://www.CathyRecommends.com>

This page has suggestions for every aspect of Internet marketing. I keep it current: sometimes I find a better resource than one I've recommended previously and sometimes I realize a particular resource is not as effective as it could be.

Here are two techies who can help set up your site or blog. Their backgrounds are very different so I recommend you talk to both.

Jocelyn "Toolie" Garner <http://bit.ly/toolietech>

Phyllis Zimblar Miller <http://www.millermosaicllc.com>

Or go to www.CathyRecommends.com for more suggestions. Remember that any link or recommendation change over time. Do your own due diligence. Talk to anyone you hire or just listen to their recordings. Often listening to a class or talk will be more helpful than a one-to-one meeting.

Marketing Strategy #3: Article Marketing

Too few authors appreciate the power of article marketing to promote themselves and their books. Used appropriately, article marketing can send traffic to your author website.

There are two approaches to article marketing.

- (1) Send hundreds of articles to directories. The most popular directory is <http://www.EzineArticles.com>

Currently they do not charge anything for you to post articles. Many marketers simply send dozens of articles here and some claim they have built a whole business this way.

- (2) Send short articles to EzineArticles but once a month, choose a major article and send it to carefully targeted locations to showcase your expertise.

Is article marketing worth it? Just about every high-powered Internet marketer uses some form of article marketing. These folks monitor and test consistently. They are careful about where they invest their time. Therefore, if you want to promote your book on the Internet, I would not skip this tactic.

Will article marketing work for you? I would say you need at least 50 to 100 articles in EzineArticles.com before you can get a sense of what's happening. If you aren't seeing results, then

- You may have a topic and/or target market that doesn't work well for articles.
- Your article titles may not be catchy. Some experts encourage keyword-rich titles that seem awkward. Others opt for short, breezy titles that grab readers. The former tend to be found more easily by search engines and directory; the latter are noticed more by publishers who want to publish them. You can try both styles.
- Your articles may not have achieved the originality and quality that is necessary if you want to "go viral," i.e., get picked up by many different sources.

If you need help with article marketing, currently I recommend Eric Gruber. I would start with his guest post,

as mentioned earlier, and get the free samples. Eric sometimes includes a surprise consultation even with low-end products; this was true as 2010 begins, but may change as he gets busy. Get started at <http://www.YourContentStrategy.net>

Your Three Fold Content Marketing Strategy

Do these strategies sound like a lot of work? Actually you make them work together to take advantage of synergies.

First, create a blog, an essential for authors these days. Then you post tips on Facebook and Twitter, with a link to a post in your blog. The post can include links and widgets directing visitors to your blog post. You usually have to shorten the permalinks with a "link shrinker," such as tinyurl.com, budurl.com or bit.ly

Your readers move along this path:

Twitter Post → Blog post → Sales Page

Second, turn your blog posts into articles. You may need to shorten or lengthen your posts. Some experts suggest modifying the content because search engines seem to penalize duplicate content. Others say, "Not worth the bother." I find you almost always need to make some modifications because you can use a more friendly, informal, conversational tone in your blog.

Now you can use your article resource box to refer readers to your blog or the sales page for your book. You can also tweet and post about your article. If you set up a system in ezinearticles.com (very easy to do), your articles will automatically be announced as tweets as soon as they are published. So your reader traffic might flow like this:

Tweet → Article → Sales Letter

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Meanwhile, your writing path looks like this:

Article → 2 blog posts → 2 tweets

I like the ratio of

One Article = 2 Blog Posts

But sometimes you'll just have

One Article = 1 Post

And sometimes you can get as many as three or four posts from one article.

Want to do even more on the Internet?

Consider creating a Squidoo lens. Despite the odd name, Squidoo lenses can be great traffic magnets. Many people get traffic to their main websites from their lenses.

Squidoo is a do-it-yourself opportunity. No need to hire a designer.

Checklist: HOW LIKELY WILL YOUR BOOK GET FAVORABLE REVIEWS ON AMAZON?

One: Is there just one obvious place to shelve your book?

The clearer your answer, the more likely your book will get good reviews and sell well. If you say, "Well, there are two possible places..." you raise the odds.

My own published book, [Making the Big Move](#), turned out to have this problem, although I don't think the publisher and I were responsible. For instance, the book was written as self help with a sub-title, "Guide to A Life Transition." One book chain insisted on shelving it with the "home" section, right next to books on choosing furniture and wallpaper. I believe that's because the topic was so unusual.

Two: Does your book fit into a single recognizable genre?

You need to be more specific than fiction vs. non-fiction or even mystery vs. suspense. If you are writing a mystery, is it a "cozy" or a "hard-boiled detective story?"

Mixing genres can work if you are especially skilled in some fields. For instance, some readers believe Kate Atkinson's books cross the line between literary fiction and detective story. But if you mix self-help with memoir, readers will rebel.

Three: Does your book follow formulas and conventions for the genre?

I've given an overview in this Report, but you need to go further. Find some best selling books in your genre and outline them. Read "how to write" books and take notes.

Four: Does your book disclose your values before the reader gets started?

For instance, is your book positioned as a business how-to book, but the author talks about using religious values to get results? Are you promoting a nutrition book that depends on using very specific formulas or foods? Make sure your reader anticipates these orientations.

“Christian fiction” and “Christian self-help” are separate genres. Reviewers either review in those genres or they don’t. If you surprise a reviewer, you’ve wasted a book copy.

Five: Can you state the book’s premise in a single sentence or two?

Whether fiction or non-fiction, your book can be summarized in a sentence or two. For example, Martha Beck’s book on career change can be summarized as, “You find your dream career by following your inner compass, which turns out to be listening to your body and observing your own actions.” This book is exceptionally well-organized, with each chapter supporting the theme.

Joe Loya’s memoir, *The Man Who Outgrew His Prison Cell*, can be summarized as, “Joe Loya hit bottom while serving a sentence for bank robbery. Realizing he needs to change to survive, he starts a new career and a life as a professional writer.”

I recommend that you practice writing two-sentence summaries of books that you especially enjoyed as well as books that became best sellers.

Six: Who will read this book?

Answer this question with reference to other books.

For instance, if you are writing a cozy mystery, you might say, "Followers of M.C. Beaton and Rhys Bowen will like this book." Recently I reviewed *The Art of Choosing* by Sheena Iyengar, a Columbia University professor. I would say that this book targets readers who can't wait for the next book by Malcolm Gladwell or Atul Gawande.

You can also think about demographics. A book about memory loss in the elderly will appeal to people who are in their fifties and up and/or their families and friends. A book about parenting troubled teens will appeal to parents of teens.

Geography affects reader choices and responses. Since moving to Seattle, I've become much more interested in novels that take place here, such as the mysteries by newcomer Wendy Roberts and the Beaumont series by J. A. Jance.

One well-known mystery writer supposedly got her start when an editor recognized the small town where she set her novel. The editor knew the town well and was motivated to read more.

Sometimes novels and memoirs appeal to readers who have interest in special issues. For instance, Jodi Picoult's books seem to reach readers who relate to the family situations (as well as other readers, of course). I am often drawn to books about miscarriages of justice.

Seven: Why will readers choose and like this book?

Sometimes the answer will be pretty straightforward. Readers will buy a book like *Finding a New Job With Social Media* because they are searching for a new job. They bought Martha Beck's book, *Finding Your Own North Star*,

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because they were hungry for new careers but not sure where to get started searching.

Sometimes it's trickier. Readers will buy almost anything Po Bronson writes. It's hard to imagine that the local library will choose not to buy the next Sue Grafton book.

Fiction readers may be searching for a novel that makes them see the world a new way. They may want to spend an afternoon escaping to spend time with different people and maybe even a different planet.

Mystery readers don't just want a good plot. They often like strong characters. In fact, they often remember the name of the protagonist better than the author. Ask a seasoned mystery reader about Spenser, Nero Wolfe, Kate Shugak, Sharon McCone, Claire Ferguson and Holly Winter.

WORKSHEET FOR GETTING BOOK REVIEWS

(1) What is your book's genre (e.g., mystery, self-help, memoir)? _____

(2) What is your book about? For example, your genre may be "memoir" but your topic is "illness."

(3) Look for books in the same genre on the same subject. Find reviewers who commented favorably on those books...or choose reviewers who were harshly critical, if you believe yours is better.

List 5-10 reviewers:

(3) Of those reviewers, place a star next to reviewers who have achieved Amazon 1000, 500 or 100 rank.

(4) Place a checkmark next to those who are identified as Vine reviewers.

(5) The reviewers with both a star and a checkmark are your prime targets. Write to them first. Follow the guidelines we discussed earlier.

(6) Write to reviewers who have just a star next to their names.

(7) For more reviews, look at reviewers who reviewed books in your book's genre. Would some of those books attract readers who also read your book? If so, write to the reviewers as before.

(8) Start writing reviews of books written by other authors. Choose books that will attract the same target audience you hope to attract.

Cover a broad range of books to get maximum exposure and to get a sense of your audience. For instance, let's say you have a memoir of illness and recovery. You can review books on

- ✓ Self-help dealing with illness
- ✓ Thoughtful commentaries by doctors (such as Jerome Groopman's books)
- ✓ Other memoirs dealing with physical illness
- ✓ Other memoirs dealing with mental illness
- ✓ Other memoirs with similar themes

(9) As you review other books, you will become aware of other reviewers.

(10) Add your book to a Listmania list at Amazon. Make sure your list includes at least a few current best-sellers in your category.

(11) Include reviews of other books in your blog. You can also refer to reviews of your book. For instance, "I was delighted to read a review today..."

(12) Set up a google alert to let you know when your book gets mentioned online. When a blog mentions your book, write a comment on the post that mentions your book. Link back to your own blog. (It's considered gauche to offer to write a guest post, but you may be invited.)

Next steps

Sign up for "Copy-Cat Ezine," a free weekly ezine featuring realistic action steps to grow your e-business. Many of the same steps apply to authors as well. When you subscribe, you'll receive 7 Best-Kept Secrets of Client-Attracting Websites (both audio and pdf download)

<http://www.MakeWebsiteProfits.com>

If you'd like one-to-one consultation regarding your own promotional strategy, I offer services to help you develop your marketing strategy before and after you write your book. As a copywriter, I can also help with your sales letter.

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

Authors only: Get an introductory marketing consultation.
See

<http://www.makewebsiteprofits.com/book97.html>

Just for fun...

<http://www.midlifedog.com/blog>