

# Being Your Own Writer Boss

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This is the hand-out for a seminar I give on self-publishing. My contact info is at the end of this file – please feel free to get in touch if you have any questions!

## CREATING YOUR COVER

If you plan on selling through Amazon, you can use the Amazon cover creator, but I don't recommend it. You'll probably end up with an unprofessional-looking cover that won't help sell your book. But don't worry. You have options.

### Make Your Own Cover

If you have Photoshop, Corel or another photo manipulation app and are handy with it, you can try making your own covers. If you need stock images, I have a few recommendations below. Standard cover proportions for eBooks are 2:3 – so, for instance, 2500 x 3750. Use the standard proportions and make your cover at least 2500 wide.

Here are a couple image resources. The first I don't use for covers:

**Pixabay:** This is a free image site (just make sure you don't click on the Sponsored Images section up top). I wouldn't use these for covers, but they are great for blog posts, etc. Best practice is to credit the photographer/artist when using one, but it's not required.

<https://pixabay.com/>

**Deposit Photos:** This is where I get all my cover art. Join App Sumo (<https://appsumo.com>) and once or twice a year they offer a fantastic deal – 100 images for \$50. That's 50¢ for cover art, and they allow you to use images on the cover with the standard license. Some sites require a much higher payment.

<https://www.depositphotos.com>

## Use a Pre-Made Cover

There are a number of graphic designers that sell pre-made covers – basically template covers they sell once only to authors for use on their books. While they may not be quite as specific to your story as you would like, this is a very affordable way to get a professional level cover.

I haven't done it yet, though I regularly stalk this site, which a friend of mine has used a number of times for her books. He will customize the text for you:

<http://goonwrite.com>

## Hire a Designer

Sometimes only a professional will do. I do a mix of my own covers and having them done. Often I do everything but the typography, and hire a designer to do that part for me. You can find cover designers a number of ways. Ask your author friends. Post the question in a Facebook group related to what you write. Or check these Facebook Groups:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1481769025267697/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/TheSFFM/>

I have a personal recommendation – Kelley York, a former Sacramento area designer (she's in Eureka now) at Sleepy Fox Studios, designed the cover for the River City Chronicles, and did the typography for me for two sci fi trilogy rereleases and other books. She also offers pre-mades:

<https://www.sleepyfoxstudio.net>

## MAKING YOUR EBOOK

If you're going to self publish, you'll need some way to get your book from a word file into an eBook format you can sell online. You can do this via direct upload to Amazon, but as with using Amazon's cover designer, the results can leave a lot to be desired.

### Vellum is Amazing

I use a fantastic app for making books called Vellum. It's a bit on the pricey side - \$199 for eBooks only, and \$249 for eBooks and print books together. And it's only available for Mac. But it's hands-down the best and easiest to use eBook creator on the market. I don't get anything for recommending it to you, FYI. I just love working with it. I've used it now to make more than thirty books for myself and for author clients. You can find it at:

<https://vellum.pub>

## Draft2Digital is Free

Don't have a Mac, or can't afford Vellum? Draft2Digital is an eBook distribution platform. I use it to distribute my eBooks to Barnes & Noble, Kobo, Apple Books, and many more (I upload to Amazon directly and let D2D do the rest).

But D2D will also create downloadable eBooks (mobi/kindle and epub/B&B/Kobo/iBooks) for you for free. They make their money taking a cut of sales, but you don't have to use their sales platform. They s let you use the eBook maker part with no obligation – just upload your word file and go from there.

<https://www.draft2digital.com/>

## Other Apps

There are a couple other popular apps for creating books, but I have never used them personally:

<https://www.literatureandlatte.com/scrivener/overview>

<https://calibre-ebook.com>

## CREATING YOUR AUTHOR WEBSITE

Do you need a website? If writing is a hobby for you, you probably don't. But if you plan to pursue this as a career (even a secondary one), you're going to want to have a website, a place where you can share everything about you and your work with the world, and have total control over the content.

In the last few years, Wordpress has become one of the main platforms for hosting a website. It started as a blog platform, but now with so many themes (the look/structure of the site) and plugins (apps for Wordpress) you can build almost any kind of site in WP. The great thing about Wordpress is you don't have to built it all at once. Don't be afraid. Jump in and build as you go.

### Wordpress.Org vs.Hosting

You can host your website for free at Wordpress,org, but we recommend against it. The plugins and themes available for sites on Wordpress.org are extremely limited. If you can afford it, we recommend WPEngine – they charge \$300 a year, and their customer service (available by phone or chat on their site).

## A Great Theme

We have a theme we love because it's both cheap and full of features. It's called Generate Press, and you can get it here:

<https://generatepress.com/premium/>

The free version is great – try it first. It may do everything you need. But the paid version is just \$49.95, and you can make unlimited websites with it.

## Plugins (and WTH is a Plugin?)

As I mentioned above, plugins are the apps of the Wordpress world. There are a few plugins I use on every site, and one that I use on my writing sites:

**AddtoAny Share Buttons:** A great free plugin that lets you add social media "share" buttons to your blog posts and pages. Tons and tons of platforms supported.

**Askimet Anti-Spam:** If your comments start being hit by spammers, this is a great way to cut them way down. Includes a "pay what you want" option.

**GTranslate:** A free plugin that adds a sidebar "widget" (Wordpress for sidebar section) that lets visitors translate your page into the languages you choose.

**ImSanity:** I love this plugin. It lets you set a maximum image size (I use 600 pixels, 85% quality, convert png to jpg) for uploads, and can also convert memory-heavy .png files to .jpg format. It works seamlessly in the background, saving you space on your site hosting plan.

**Mailpoet:** Many folks use Mailchimp, and I understand that it's a great plugin. I use Mailpoet, a similar plugin, and I love both the ease of use, the fact that you can email a list of up to 2,000 folks for free, and the great support the app has.

**Ninja Forms:** This is a great contact form plugin, and if you ever need to take paid orders via your site, there are add-ons for that for Paypal and Authorize.net. Better yet, the basic version is free.

**Quick featured Images:** if you do a lot of posts like I do, this is a great time saver. It automatically makes the first image on your post the "featured image," saving you from having to choose one manually for each post.

**Social Media Widget by Acurax:** Another free social media plugin, this one for adding a nice set of social media icons/links to the sidebar of your site, with a variety of styles to choose from.

**Yoast Duplicate Post:** Handy for when you write similar posts and want to quickly make a copy of a previous one.

There's also one plugin I recommend specifically for authors:

**Mooberry Book Manager:** Written by a former author, the basic single-author version of this plugin is free. It's a great way to manage your books on your site – it lets you add all the relevant information, including buy links, and then post it on sidebars and pages by genre series, keyword tag, and much more.

## **Filling Your Newsletter With Great Things**

So you're ready to put together a newsletter, but you have no idea what to put in it? First thing is to make sure you send it out on a regular basis. I do weekly, but you can do biweekly, monthly, bimonthly, etc. Just make sure it's consistent.

### **Blog Post Updates**

Mailpoet lets you drop in blog posts, so you can be creating newsletter content as you go. I post my reviews, podcast appearances, book releases, and other author news as I get them, and then share those posts to Facebook, and all of those become fodder for my newsletter.

I also write a weekly column about writing and life. Sometimes the topics are deep and serious. Sometimes they're light and frivolous – see my ode to Peeps. They become conversation starters on Facebook, and my headline content for the newsletter.

But there are other things you can do too, to create unique content for your readers. Some of the things I've done:

### **Blog Serials**

A few years ago, I started a serial story called The River City Chronicles. Each week I wrote a new chapter (a la Tales of the City) and had it translated into Italian. Two of the characters were based on Italian friends of ours, and I wanted them to be able to read it. I posted it on my blog, shared it to social media, and then rolled it into my newsletter. Bonus – it's now out in novel form in English, Italian, and a dual language version. You don't have to write a novel, though. You can write a series of short stories, or repurpose something you have sitting on your shelf.

### **Author Interviews & Guest Posts**

You can also ask other authors create content for you. Create a set of interview questions and ask your author friends to fill it out. We have one here you're welcome to use:

<https://www.otherworldsink.com/interview-questions/>

You can also find other similar authors and arrange newsletter swaps where they send you a post or book announcement for your newsletter, and you do the same for them.

## **Blog Tours**

Another great source of free content is the author blog tour. Blog tour companies are always looking for new blogs, so find one that does tours for your genre(s) and get on their list.

We run OtherWorldsInk.com and specialize in LGBTQ romance, LGBTQ speculative fiction and general spec fic. But there are many other tour companies out there.

## **PROMO YOUR BOOK ON FACEBOOK**

### **Do I Want a Group or a Page?**

Most of us have a personal Facebook page. The social media platform is almost essential in business today, whether you're a doctor attorney, or writer. But Facebook also offers two other options – Business Pages and Groups. Many authors have a Business Page, but Facebook has ratcheted down exposure for these more and more over time. The primary reason to have a business page these days is that it allows you to run Facebook ads when you get to 300 likes.

Groups, on the other hand, were made to foster community. They too see less interaction and traffic than they once did, but they are still better than pages. Consider setting up a group wither under your own name "John Smith's Author Fan Club" or under your series name "The Red Planet Chronicles."

### **What Should I Post?**

On your Business page, you should mostly post information specific to your books and writing career. New release announcements, sales, giveaways, book signings and the like. On your group and personal pages, post a lot more personal content. This is good both as a Facebook strategy – FB will share this material more widely – and as a reader strategy, giving readers a window into your world.

Consider what you want your author brand to be. Are you always hopeful? Romantic? Political? I made the choice early on to be up front with my politics. I'm a gay author, so most of my audience is going to be on the liberal side. It was a natural fit for me, but it might make sense for you to keep your politics to yourself. It's up to you, and it may change and evolve over time.

## Facebook is Like Dune

Ever read the book *Dune*, or see the film? Maybe you remember how the giant sandworms would listen for footsteps on the sand and then surface to devour the person making them. So the freemen learned how to walk irregularly, never creating a pattern that might draw them in. Facebook is like that. Its algorithms search for patterns of action that exceed Facebook's maximums and then throw the offenders in Facebook Jail, sometimes for a day, sometimes for a week. Not being able to post (or comment, or whatever) can be debilitating, especially if you have a new release you're trying to promote.

Over time, I've learned how to avoid summoning the worm, and I'll share what I have learned. Use a timer or timer app for these:

—When messaging multiple people, message no more than five per half hour.

—When messaging to FB business pages, message no more than 15 per 24 hours

—When posting to pages or groups you don't own, post to no more than five per half hour. Write five slightly different posts, and use bit.ly to create unique links for each post. Here's how to do that:

—Go to bit.ly and set up a free account.

—Outside of bit.ly, paste your link five times, one per line

—At the end of each link, add #something, where *something* is different for each line:

<https://www.mylink.com#1>

<https://www.mylink.com#2>

—Copy each link into bit.ly, one at a time, and then paste it into one of your five posts.

—This way FB will see each link as a unique link, and you will not be penalized

—Then post away.

That's it – these steps should help you avoid Facebook Jail while getting the word out about your book. See the list of FB groups at the end for some group ideas to join.

One more thing. Facebook has a hard limit for friending – 5000 max. This may seem like a lot, but I almost hit it last year, and spent three months cleaning up my friends list. Pay attention to who you friend, and don't be afraid to say no or ask how they found you.

## **PROMO YOUR BOOK ON TWITTER**

Honestly, I spend a lot more time on Facebook than I do Twitter, and I am not as familiar with all the ins and outs of the platform. But I do find it useful for amplifying my promotional messaging.

### **Grow Your Followers**

There are a few ways to increase your follower count without resorting to unethical means.

First off, make sure you include all your social media links, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram et al in all your communications – your email signature, your blog posts, your blog/website, etc.

Second, find other Twitter users with followers similar to your readers and start following them. Author associations are great places for this - RWA for romance, SFWA for speculative fiction, etc.

Do them in small batches – maybe 25 at a time. Once you have a few hundred, go back each time you add a batch and remove the same number of folks you are following that you just added, but here's the key – remove some of the ones who don't follow you back. This will both help your follower to following ratio, and keep you below Twitter's follow caps. At certain points, Twitter will stop you from following anyone else beyond a certain number until you gain more followers. This helps you get around those caps.

Third, find a group of readers/writers who do what you do – your genre or genres – and make a post on Facebook asking for authors to share their Twitter feeds and for readers to like the ones that interest them (you may wanna ask the group/page admin's permission first). Then put yours first, and like all the ones that come after yours.

Work on these over time, and you'll build a decent Twitter following. I post all of my news/blog posts to my Twitter feed in addition to Facebook.

### **Use Your Hastags**

Twitter is all about the hashtag – handy key words to find content you like. Follow your favorite authors in your field and note which hashtags they use. Hastags can also lead you to Twitter communities. You'll find a list of some great Twitter hashtags here:

<https://www.queerscifi.com/twitter-hashtags/>

## **PROMOTE ON BOOKBUB**

Most people know BookBub as the daily email where you can find great deals on eBooks. It's that, but it can also be a decent place to place new release ads. I've had mixed success here – some ads have done really well, and others have only generated a few responses. But it's a fairly cheap way to get some extra eyeballs on your book on release day.

### **Snagging a BookBub**

First thing to know about BookBub – it's really hard to move books via the site that are not 99¢. BookBub Deals are almost always this pricepoint. Even so, they can be very lucrative, netting you a few thousand dollars for a day or two of sales and rocketing you up the Amazon charts. I've had one so far, and snagged the top spot in hard sci fi and #67 overall for Amazon eBooks. Woo hoo! It's not cheap – prices vary by genre – but you will likely make far more than you spend. I suggest submitting book one in a completed series – you can also expect to see some spillover sales for other books.

### **Placing An Ad**

If you want to place an ad for a new book, you can use Bookbub's handy tool to create one, or if you are graphic-savvy, make your own. Just be sure to include a catchy tagline (if it includes your book's main trope, even better), a call to action button, and the price. BookBub has some great tips here:

<https://insights.bookbub.com/tips-improving-roi-bookbub-ads-campaigns>

### **BookBub Reviews**

Finally, another way to extend your reach on the platform is to review other authors' books there. The reviews are shared with your BookBub followers, and may inspire those authors to review you.

## **BUILD YOUR LIST WITH PROLIFIC WORKS**

Prolific Works (aka Instafreebie) is a book giveaway platform. I use it mainly for two things – for author copies of the anthology we publish, and also to build my email list. The first is straightforward – just upload your book, create a giveaway, and give the recipients the link.

### **Building Your Mailing List One Giveaway at a Time**

Prolific Works is also great for attracting new readers. You can do this in two ways – joining an existing giveaway or creating your own. For existing giveaways, you can search them out by genre and then submit a book. I do this about once a month. But I also create my own on a regular basis, varying the topic/genre and then inviting folks on Facebook to join it.

What books should you give away? Keep in mind your work is worth something. If you give it all away, you devalue it. Generally speaking, I give away short stories on the platform (though I have also done a few novellas and my anthology Spells and Stardust). Choose a few works and cycle through them, varying the mix.

With Prolific Works, you need to pay the \$20 monthly minimum to be able to access the emails they collect, so consider if it's worth it for you. I download them monthly and upload to Mail Poet, but Prolific Works also supports direct import to Mail Chimp and one or two others, if you pay for the privilege.

A note about GDPR: The European Union enacted a privacy law a few years ago that prohibits adding people to your email list without their express permission (meaning they actually have to actively click "yes"), especially if they are getting a giveaway from you. Canada has a similar law. Prolific Works allows you (in some circumstances) to force people to accept being added to your list. We strongly recommend against this. You should always allow them to opt-in.

## **OTHER USEFUL LINKS**

### **Facebook Kindle Unlimited Promo Groups**

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/602196313230557/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/511411235626051/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/kindleunlimitedbookworms/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/KDPSelectAuthors/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1508166606099349>  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/726719700725461/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/927360507343854/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/832128160213284/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/KUFreeFiction/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/548083355320110/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/442045625977403/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/unlimitedkindlereads/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/294844380851868/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1578232149147942/>

And finally... Narwhals. Watch at your own risk – you'll be singing it for days! Just for fun.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbby9coDRCK>

## Contact Me

Have any questions about my presentation or the info in this file? Reach out to me:

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