

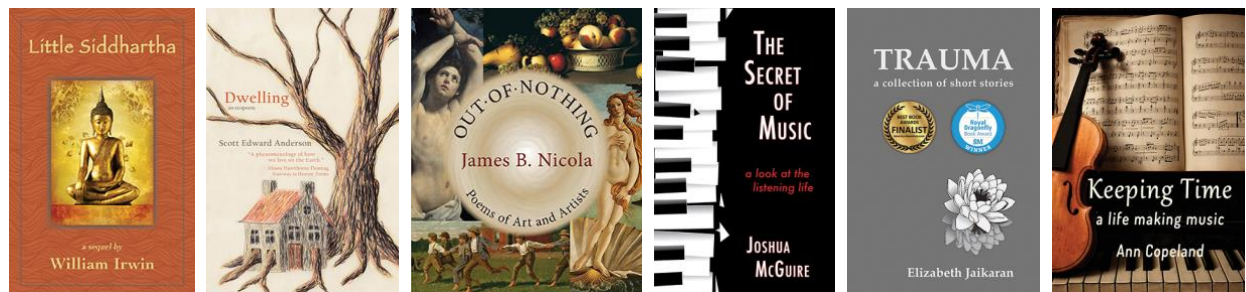
Shanti Arts Publishing

Marketing, Promoting, and Selling Books

THE BUSINESS OF PUBLISHING HAS CHANGED DRAMATICALLY IN THE LAST COUPLE OF DECADES. THERE'S BEEN AN EXPLOSION OF self-publishing. Inexpensive digital editions have changed the way books are designed, purchased, and read. Print-on-demand printers now produce beautiful, high quality books, and POD has many advantages for both authors and publishers: publishers don't need to guess about the number of books to print in advance, publishers don't need to pay warehouse fees to store unsold books, and authors can be assured that books will not sell out during the contracted period of availability. Audio books are now enjoying a surge in popularity.

Similarly, the business of promoting and selling books has changed. A majority of books are purchased online, primarily from Amazon, and Amazon offers all sorts of opportunities to package book promotions through Kindle lending, giveaways, Prime membership, and more. In recent years, blogs have been a popular way to announce and review books as print media advertising has become expensive and unpopular. But blogs are now not as popular as podcasts and videos. Social media, especially Facebook and Twitter, is touted as the twenty-first-century way to do just about everything, though we may be starting to see a shift in how social media is used. Nothing stays the same for very long . . . except for maybe one thing . . .

Selling books requires work, and there is no surefire way to make it happen. Beware though—there are many people and companies that are more than willing to take your money once they've convinced you that they have a method that is sure to increase the value of your royalty checks.



THIS DOCUMENT HAS TWO PURPOSES: ONE, TO MAKE CLEAR WHAT WE, SHANTI ARTS PUBLISHING, DO TO PROMOTE OUR books and what we generally expect our authors will do to promote their books; and two, to share some ideas we have gleaned over the years about marketing and promotion. We are constantly learning, so this document is changed from time to time.

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producing audio books but have chosen to not go that route at this point. Our print wholesaler is Ingram, the largest book wholesaler in the country; retail outlets routinely purchase books through them. Availability of books through all the various formats and outlets is important, and we do whatever we can to cast our books as widely as possible into the delivery stream.

➔ When working with retailers, we ask our authors to suggest they contact us directly; we may in fact offer a slightly better discount than Ingram. Some stores, however, prefer working with Ingram, and that's fine. We also ask authors to provide a direct link on their website to the page on our site that offers their book's purchase link. Most authors will also want to provide a direct link to the book's Amazon page; that is fine, but we ask that the link to our page be as prominent as the one to Amazon.

➔ A word about Barnes & Noble. Many authors reach out to B&N, but many also find them less than receptive. B&N has a list of [requirements](#) that need to be met before they'll consider stocking a book, and every book we publish meets all of their requirements. If you have any questions about this, please contact us.

➔ Independent bookstores tend to be more receptive about stocking local authors' books and hosting events than do national chain stores. But, in general, authors are often underwhelmed by the reception they receive from bookstores. We often hear from authors who are surprised and distressed by this treatment because most authors think that if their books are on the shelves of bookstores, they've achieved success. Not so. There is a reason why bookstores expect a full refund for returned books (yes, they do); they would go out of business otherwise. This is good for bookstores, but not so good for publishers and authors. [Here](#) is more information on this subject.

➔ *These are the things we do to promote our books:*

1. We develop and maintain a website for every book we publish. This site includes a description of the book, the author's biography, endorsements, reviews, and press releases. Authors are encouraged to provide a link to this website from their own site and refer to it in their communications. Again, most authors will also want to provide a direct link to the book's Amazon page; that is fine, but we ask that the link to our page be as prominent as the one to Amazon.
2. Our books are listed in our [online book catalog](#).
3. We pay for exposure in Ingram's family of trade catalogs called *Advance*, which are sent monthly to libraries, bookstores, and other retail outlets throughout the world.
4. We provide a limited number of review copies to send to relevant reviewers, bloggers, and others.
5. We design postcards, business cards, and bookmarks and give the files for these to our authors so they have something to use for events and connections with the press.
6. We run a sales special on books every month, promoting different individual books or categories of books.
7. We regularly advertise our books in our serial publication—*Still Point Arts Quarterly*.

8. If the author finds it useful, we prepare a press release. The author is encouraged to distribute the release through their contacts, and we distribute it to news agencies and search engines around the world through PRlog.com.

9. We send book release announcements to our list of contacts.

10. We include a bookmark in every customer shipment, and these bookmarks are used to advertise our books.

➔ *These are things authors can do to promote their books:*

1. For many of our books, the majority of sales have occurred over time through events: receptions, gallery exhibitions, library talks, conferences, etc. So, plan a book release event . . . or multiple events. Artists are encouraged to find a venue for an exhibition of their work that is timed soon after the book is released. Authors should find a venue that makes sense for them. Consider a gallery, coffee shop, bookstore (independent bookstores are often more receptive than chain bookstores), business lobby, museum, meditation center, yoga studio, garden, etc. Use your connections and your imagination. Send out invitations (to lots of relatives, friends, and acquaintances) and provide refreshments. Advertise your event in ways that make sense: contact the local newspapers, hang posters around town, get your event on community calendars, etc. Plan to do a reading or slide show, or even an art demonstration. Be sure to invite people from local newspapers (by phone). Sell art prints and, of course, sign and sell books. The most successful authors do multiple events spread out over time.

2. We encourage authors to post information about their books on their websites, blogs, and social media sites . . . whatever you use and wish to maintain. Very importantly, once is not enough. Begin this process a couple months before the release of your book and continue for many months afterwards. Post brief selections or quotes from the book, news about book-related events, images from the book, news about where the book is available and may be purchased, links to reviews, pictures from events, and information about YOU, the author.

3. As soon as you have a signed contract, consider putting an automatic footer on your email that announces your book; this announcement then automatically goes to everyone you communicate with. Once you have a book cover, add that to the footer. Once you have blurbs or reviews, add a few quotes to your footer. Once you have a release date, put that in the footer. And, eventually, put a link to purchase the book in your footer.

4. Ask people to write a review of your book on Amazon. If someone says something nice about your book, ask them to put a short review on Amazon. This is important because reviews are part of the algorithm used to determine which books are recommended to certain Amazon buyers.

5. An author page on Amazon is also a good idea. It's very easy to set this up.

6. Visit local bookstores and ask them to carry your book. Bring a copy with you to show them, along with copies of any helpful reviews or articles. Some stores, especially independent stores, are very interested in supporting local authors and artists. Stores that decide to carry your book may obtain copies from Ingram—they'll be familiar with this company. If someone tells you they won't carry POD books, be sure to tell them the books are RETURNABLE. This is key. They may also purchase books from us; often we can offer a slightly

better discount.

7. Contact newspapers and magazines (local or regional) to see if a reporter would write an article. Having an interesting sub-story about the book will help to capture the attention of a reporter. Just writing a book is not all that interesting. You have to pitch your book within the context of something larger. The same is true of blogs. Find blogs that relate to your topic and pitch your book (and an interesting sub-story) to them.

8. Note that marketing and promotion efforts should stretch across a long period of time. Everything does not have to be done in the first month, and, in fact, it is better to have a sustained publicity program over a period of many months. You will sometimes hear that your marketing efforts should start many months before your book is released. I don't necessarily agree. But I do think there is a danger in stopping your marketing efforts too soon. Develop a written marketing plan at the beginning of the process. Don't get discouraged when books don't sell early on. Stick to your plan.

9. Some authors and artists may want to hire a publicist to do some of this work. This costs money, and we realize that not all authors and artists are able to do this. I tend to think that hiring someone focused on selling is more important than someone focused on publicity; you may want to hire someone to work tirelessly to uncover ways to SELL your book rather than someone to get publicity about it. Big difference.

→ *A few thoughts on social media:*

I am not convinced that social media produces book sales to people who would not otherwise buy the book. I was a somewhat dedicated Facebook user for a few years. I even paid for Facebook ads. The ads produced lots of "likes" or "friends," and I was thrilled when my number of Facebook "friends" passed a thousand and quickly headed to two thousand. But I discovered that there is a big difference between "friends" who connected with me because they knew about or had some experience with my work and "friends" who connected with me through an ad. Many of these "friends" had really no interest in art, publishing, or even books, and it seemed to me that they were mostly trying to increase their number of "friends." Eventually, I decided to stop spending my time on Facebook. Somebody got rich from the money I used to buy ads, but it wasn't me.

Goodreads is probably the most popular social media site for people who like books. Goodreads is known for "giveaways," but a recent experience by one of our authors left me unconvinced about the value of the giveaways. This author did a campaign on Goodreads, and within a very short time had 250 people indicate that they wanted to read his book. Sounds great, right? One person was selected to receive a free book, and in return, the author asked the recipient to write a review on Amazon. First, we did not see a bump in sales during the time of his campaign; 250 people did not buy the book they said they wanted to read. Secondly, a signed copy of the author's book soon appeared online, and the seller was from the same town as the person who received the free book. Coincidence? Also, no review showed up on Amazon. Of course, "one experience does not a trend make," but it's worth noting.

I don't think social media helps authors much unless they already have had a significant connection with a large number of followers. Setting up a Facebook page just to sell books doesn't cut it; it's better to have had a sustained social media presence for a larger reason and then . . . oh by the way, tell your followers about the book you just wrote. Maintaining a social media presence takes A LOT of time, and some people are very skilled at maximizing the benefits of social media. If it works for you, great. If it doesn't, don't feel guilty about it.

→ *Reviews:*

Book reviews are important. A review from the top tier of reviewers (New York Times, Kirkus, Library Journal) unquestionably helps sell books. Getting reviews from these top reviewers, however, is not easy, especially for books published by small presses. Getting quality reviews elsewhere is certainly not a bad thing because it can provide the author with marketing material to share with bookstores, newspapers, libraries, etc. Amazon reviews are important because they contribute to the algorithm used to push information about certain books to certain Amazon customers. This is one important way that people find out about a book that they might otherwise never hear of. I encourage authors to ask readers to write an Amazon review, especially those who tell you they loved your book!! Also, there are companies that charge for reviews; don't bother with these.

→ *I think it comes down to networking . . .*

My feeling is that the most important thing an author can do to sell books is to network. Work your connections and be creative in thinking about how you can promote your book and how other people (bloggers, associations, organizations, clubs) can help you too. Plan events. Plan a book tour. Use your book in a workshop. Use your creativity and ingenuity. And, most importantly, don't give up.

I'm going to give the last word to BJ Gallagher, a contributor to the *Huffington Post*. Read [The Ten Awful Truths — and the Ten Wonderful Truths — About Book Publishing](#).