

# The 3 Pillars Of Selling More Books

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by Beth Bacon



In the digital book marketplace, individual authors fight in the same ring with legacy publishers.

The big publishers have an advantage: the power of their reputations grabs the notice of readers. Indie authors and publishers struggle for any attention at all. The “little guys” can overcome this disadvantage if they build their careers around three strategic pillars: brand curation, relationship marketing, and, finally, creating quality books.

## Pillar 1: Brand Curation

Successful authors don't just write books. They build their careers. Bestselling authors don't become a household name on the sales of just one book. (Okay, there's Harper Lee, but *To Kill A Mockingbird* is an epic exception). Successful writers become known within their niche. They build series, work in a single genre, and develop a clear, focused brand.



Strategies for creating best sellers take time.

### *Know your audience*

Authors who sell a lot of books know their readers. Elmore Leonard recently passed away at age 87. In its eulogy of the late, great crime writer, the business [radio show Marketplace ran an old interview with Leonard](#) in which a reporter suggested he should write about Wall Street. After all, he joked, the place is full of criminals. “But I don't write that,” Leonard replied without even pausing, “My people don't have stock. I think it's the most boring thing in the world.” Leonard knew his audience and wrote for them specifically.

### *Center it all on your website*

A major part of curating a great career is running an effective web site. High-selling authors treat their online presence like it's the hub of the universe—because, for their fans, it is. Take a look at John Green's Tumblr page. <http://fishingboatproceeds.tumblr.com/> Green is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Fault in Our Stars*, *Looking for Alaska*, and other YA novels. His posts are fun, educational, and often have nothing at all to do with his books. But they all have everything to do with the worldview of his teen audience. Green uses YouTube and Twitter and a bunch of other social media vehicles as avidly as the teenagers who read his books. But his single Tumblr web site connects to them all. It's his hub, the one solid place his fans can track the many balls that John Green juggles.

### *Be yourself*

Finally, to have a great career as a writer, don't be trendy, be yourself. Erotica is big right now. But if you are more comfortable writing PG romances, don't add titillating scenes just to jump on the racy bandwagon. Stick with your voice, be true to your own sensibilities. Readers are very canny at picking up inauthenticity.

## **Pillar 2: Relationship Marketing**

Readers now [buy more books on the web](#) than in bookstores. So if you want to sell more books, start with web retailers. If you want to sell more of anything on the web, you have to build relationships.

In her ebook "[31 Days of Twitter Tips](#)" [Becky Robinson](#) writes, "Twitter is about interaction. Twitter is about relationships." I agree with that assessment, but I'd expand it to include all internet activity. The whole internet is about relationships. Authors who build online relationships sell more books.

Online relationships grow slowly. Commit to being online every day. Sure this takes time, which a rare commodity, so build a social media plan and stick to it. Schedule out what you're going to write about, where you're going to hang out, how many people you're going to interact with. Becky Robinson suggests 12 minutes a day. We all can spare that, right? (By the way, if your problem is that you spend too much time with social media, a disciplined schedule will help you, too—leave the internet after 12 or 24 or 36 minutes, whatever you determine to be your limit.)

### *Don't post and dash—interact*

Faithfully carry out your social media schedule, one blog post a month, six tweets a day, three Facebook posts a week—whatever works for you. But don't just upload your messages and take off. Stick around and respond to what other people are saying. Be part of the conversations. Make suggestions. Give and take. Joke and laugh.

I know people who schedule a month's worth of Twitter posts in one afternoon, then complain that social media doesn't work. They're right. Social media doesn't work if you're not social. So get out there and make friends.

### *Do more than plug your book*

The content of your posts is just as important as your regular presence—maybe more so. Sure, you can blog, Facebook, or Tweet about your book—a little bit, and only when it's newsworthy. Talk about your cover reveal, announce your launch date, bring up themes that your characters grapple with. But remember, on the internet, you are in the business of building relationships. Not shilling a product.

No one wants to be friends with a singled-minded, aggressive salesperson. (I cringe when I see my Mary Kay friend's number on caller ID—even when she's just offering to help with a carpool). You wouldn't want to be that "annoying salesperson" in real life. Don't act that way online.

### *Post about what your audience cares about*

So what do you post about, if not your book? Post about things your audience cares about. If you write chick lit, post about shoes or fingernail polish. If you write children's books, post about the best ways to get a toddler to settle down at nap time. Post about what your audience cares about and your audience will care about you—they might like you enough to buy your book.

### *Don't worry about the launch, focus on promos*

Traditional book publishing used to put a lot of emphasis into the launch. But big launches are most effective when you're communicating to mass audiences via mass media in mass-market bookstores. Internet book sales are more gradual. Instead of worrying about your launch, try your hand at regular, consistent promotions. Here are some ideas:

- **Blog Tours.** Do some research to find the tour organizer that's right for you. [Samantha March](#) knows the Chick Lit market. Others know your specific niche. Be sure to choose a blog tour organizer who has lots of connections in your genre.
- **Promotional newsletters** such as [BookBub](#) and [Pixel of Ink](#) can boost sales instantly.
- **Goodreads Giveaways.** On [Goodreads](#), prerelease books can be listed for giveaway by publishers and authors. Member readers enter to win and are picked randomly at the end of the giveaway.

### **Pillar 3: Quality Books**

I suggested curating your brand and making friends online, but I haven't yet mentioned the books themselves. That's because you can actually sell a lot poorly produced books just by doing steps one and two. Those techniques work no matter how good, or lame, your book is. Creating quality books is important in selling a lot of them, but it's not vital. Still, you should strive to make each book the best it can be.

#### *Quality Feedback*

Don't rush your book out the door. Take the time to write several drafts—five, nine or ten, whatever it takes to bring the story out. After you and your writer's group feel your work is the best it can be, don't believe for a minute that you're "done." Now's the time to get feedback from even more readers.

"I suggest ten—yes ten—fresh readers, people who have never read your manuscript," Renda Belle Dodge writes in her book "[The Indie Writer's Workshop](#)." Dodge, a Seattle novelist who also runs [Pink Fish Press](#), insists on listening to feedback and implementing changes, even at that "final draft" stage. "When I wrote my first novel, I think I announced that I was 'done' seven or eight times," said Dodge. Writing is a solitary task, but revision is a community project. Ask people for feedback and really listen to it.

#### *Great Cover*

The mood and dynamism of your cover must match the mood and dynamism of your writing. Author Patrick Snow chose an image of a tropical beach for the cover of his nonfiction work, [The Affluent Entrepreneur](#). The image represents the result of the advice in this book, not a literal depiction of the content within his chapters. "Creating your own cover design is possibly the single greatest error an author can make," says Patrick Snow, "Hire experienced graphic designers for your cover to make that stunning first impression."

#### *Quality Editing*

Great editing helps make great books. If you're self-publishing, pay for a good editor. If you work with a publisher, cherish this relationship. You can find a range of high-quality editors at sites such as [Writer.ly](#) or the [Editorial Freelancers Association](#).

#### *Create what your audience wants to read*

Great phrasing, twisty plots, relatable characters, vivid settings... those are the fundamentals of a great novel. Non-fiction books depend on clear, useful, and exciting prose. There are thousands of resources for writing a better book, but the bottom line for creating popular books is to know what your readers want, make it easy for them to find you, and give it to them in a book without flaws.

### **Selling books takes time**

Nurture your brand. Build strong relationships. Develop quality books. Stick to those three pillars and you will sell more books. None of these strategies happens quickly, all of them must be slowly and carefully developed.

A true “overnight success” is extremely rare in all walks of life. Success in bookselling, as with any goal worth striving for, takes careful, steady dedication. The big publishers who have large, loyal followings have built those followings over decades. Many staff members have had lengthy careers selling books and have become experts in the field. You can compete against them, and succeed as they do, if you take the same long-term, professional perspective they do.

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