BOOK MARKETING:
Discover Insider Secrets to Selling Books to Libraries
Interview with Amy Collins

Susan Friedmann: Welcome to Book Marketing Mentors, the weekly podcast where you learn proven strategies, tools, ideas, and tips from the masters. Every week I introduce you to a marketing master who will share their expertise to help you market and sell more books.

Today, my special guest expert of the week is a true book expert. Amy Collins has been a book buyer and seller for over 20 years. In that time, she's worked with Barnes & Noble, Target, Costco, Borders, Books-A-Million, Walmart, and all the major chains, as well as helping launch several private label publishing programs for book chains and companies such as PetSmart and CBS. In 2006, she started New Shelves Distribution, a book marketing company for small presses, that has quickly become the fastest growing book distribution company in North America. A few months ago, I interviewed Amy and she shared her insider secrets to selling your book on Amazon. I asked her back to share her insight and secrets on a little known subject that is selling your books to libraries. Amy, welcome back to the show and thank you for agreeing to share more of your wisdom as this weeks guest expert and mentor.

Amy Collins: Well, thanks, Susan. I always love talking to you and talking about our industry. It changes so often, and there's always so many new things to learn. I really love your podcast.

Susan Friedmann: Well, thank you. I appreciate it. Amy, you have become a go-to person when it comes to marketing books to libraries. Talk to us about this well-kept secret, I think, in this publishing environment.

Amy Collins: At some point I heard that the only constant in life was change. If you had asked me five years ago if libraries were worth the time of day, if it was worth anyone's attention, I would have laughed. I would have said, "No," that libraries and independent bookstores were on their way out, they were slowly dying, they were a teeny part of the marketplace, they won't worth our time, but like everything else in the publishing industry, and in the media industry, heck, in the world, things change. In the last two years, I don't know if it's because of the economy, the fact that the entire world has learned the benefits of exchange economics, but libraries have had an
enormous resurgence. The foot traffic in North America, in all of the libraries across our continent, the foot traffic has more than doubled in the last two years.

The budgets have gone up almost 20% for materials, libraries like to call books and eBooks and audio books and DVDs. They lump them all under the phrase "materials." Material budgets have gone up dramatically, and a number of people who visit libraries and use libraries has grown enormously. According to the Pew Foundation, fewer than 5% of American’s have even set foot in a bookstore in the last five years, but according to the American Library Association, who did an enormous material survey for 2015, so these are very new numbers, 68% of American's have a library card. 68% of American's have a library card, according to the ALA, and almost 50% of those people have been in a library in the last month. I'm a music major with an English degree, but even I can do that math.

That is far, far outstripping the number of people in bookstores. I'll also tell you that if you take a look at the Book Industry Study Group, they tell you that books that are stocked in libraries, 100 units or more, over 100 different library systems or more, are five times more likely to be selling on Amazon at a brisk rate. There is something about having your book in a library that gives it either a nod of credibility, or just the word of mouth that dramatically increases your sales outside of the library. Because of these facts, you bet I'm the girl who's talking about libraries lately.


Amy Collins: Well, there's a couple of steps you need to take. If you are a self published author, and I mean truly self published. If you've published the book under your own imprint, you simply go to the American Library Association website, and Susan, I will send you the link to the actual signup page, but you need to register your publisher name in the buyers guide. The American Library Association has a buyers guide and once you're vetted by them, it's an online form, it's not hard to fill out, but they need to make sure you're real. They need to make sure that you actually published a book and that, but once you're registered with the American Library Association in their buyers guide, you then can apply to a number of different wholesalers, in the United States, and in Canada. Again, I'm mainly talking about North America right now, although this advice does translate to Australia, South Africa.

Most of the English speaking countries outside of the North American
borders have this exact same process, just with slightly different business names. When I say apply to Brodart, which is one of the larger library wholesalers in North America, there's other editions and versions of that in your country, but in North America, you want your book to be listed at Ingram Library Services, Baker & Taylor, at Brodart. You definitely want to apply at Quality and Unique. These five wholesalers ... Follett is an interesting animal. If you're at all interested in university, or high school, or school libraries, you want to apply to these wholesalers and once you're approved, if you're approved, but once you're approved, they'll place a small order and they'll put one or two copies of your book in their warehouse, or they'll simply list you on their website and the librarians, knowing that they can order your book from them, will give you a far, far broader listen than if you say to them, "No, I'm not available in any wholesalers."

Susan Friedmann: It's a matter of getting registered first, and then you can start approaching these wholesalers so everything is done through the wholesalers. Is that correct?

Amy Collins: Yes. I speak to many librarians and library experts in the course of my day, and they will all tell you that librarians want to know that the book they're considering has been approved by an outside third party. If Baker & Taylor appreciate your book enough to put it on their shelves, the librarians feel very confident. One of the things that's so important after you get registered is to get your book listed in some of these wholesalers. The librarians that I've spoken to, and I speak to hundreds of them every month, the librarians that I speak to will tell you that what they're looking for more than anything is verification from a third party outside vendor. If one of their trusted wholesalers likes your book enough to put it on their shelf or to recommend it to them, they will give you a far greater chance than if you are not listed with those wholesalers, so yes, registration first, and then stocking and listing at the wholesaler second.

Susan Friedmann: As a publisher, as Aviva Publishing, would you recommend that Viva then becomes recognized by these different wholesalers?

Amy Collins: I would. Aviva should register. Make sure that all of your books are listed in Books In Print, properly through Bowker, make sure that you as a company are registered in the buyers guide, make sure that your books are all listed on WorldCat.org. www.WorldCat, as in globe, not a dog, .org. Simply go to WorldCat.org, type in your ISBNs. If your books are listed there, then you're already in great shape, but those are the steps you should do before you contact the very first library.
Susan Friedmann: Because I've had authors who want to get their books into libraries and they don't know whether they're independent or they're published, so that's something that I know is, Aviva I have to do. When multiple libraries are interconnected by a big system, can you still approach, let's say an individual local library to carry your book?

Amy Collins: That's what you should do. That's what's wonderful about libraries. Do you remember a moment ago I said that one of the easiest and best ways to get a librarian to be interested in your book was to have a third party vet it? Well, one of the other ways that they love to find out about books is to find out that fellow sister libraries in their same system are having success with your book. Chicago has dozens and dozens and dozens and dozens of libraries in its system. You get your book into one or two libraries in the Chicago system, and as that book is being checked out, and as its popularity grows, the other libraries in the Chicago system, you don't even have to call them. They see that. They get reports every week, and they're constantly pouring over those reports, looking to see what their fellow librarians are having success with, and they're ordering those books.

If you're in Oak Lawn, Illinois, and you're having success in a book, I promise you, Naperville, Illinois is going to hear about that, and if you have a strong enough success, they're going to want to mimic that, and they're going to order your book. You don't even have to do anything. Viral growth in libraries is so much easier than anywhere else because library systems are connected, because these reports are offered every week.

Susan Friedmann: Let's talk about physical books versus eBooks, or eBooks versus physical books, because I know that there's a whole different system with regard to the digital products that libraries are interested in. Talk to us about that.

Amy Collins: Well, the first two steps are identical. You get registered in the buyers guide, you make sure that the books are listed, but the wholesalers, you once again will apply to wholesalers for the eBooks, just like you do for physical books, but the names of the wholesalers are different. You want to go to Access 360, which by the way, is owned by Baker & Taylor. You want to go to Pro Quest, which is owned by Bowker, actually. It's not a bad idea to have your book, if you're print on demand, through Ingram Spark, to make sure that you offer your eBook through them because they will make your book available to some of these wholesalers such as Overdrive, 3M. These are some of the different wholesalers.

It’s the same process but different company names that you need to get your book approved, and listed in their systems, so that when you approach a library, let's say back up in Chicago, and they agree to take one
copy of your eBook to test it, they will then go to these eBook wholesalers and they will buy a copy. The nice thing about eBooks is that once you prove yourself, you then can license your eBook for a very nice chunk of change, for a much higher level. If you are an in demand author in the Chicago area, yes, you sold an eBook to the library, but they can only loan that out one at a time, and when they need more, you can have set your book to be license only, and you can actually have that eBook licensed so that the library who's allowed to loan it out one at a time, for the course of, let's say a year, in exchange for $40. They will give you $40 for a one year license, or they'll give you $50 for a 100 loan license, that's not connected to a particular amount of time.

You and the wholesalers set the price, and those licenses become a very nice generator of passive income. This happens over time. You don't start out as a new author demanding $50 licenses from libraries. Let me be clear. You start out selling your eBook to a library, but once you get in demand, other libraries are falling in, your demand rises, then you can switch to a licensing format, and it's a very nice, nice income stream in the future.

Susan Friedmann: Talk to us about licensing and how that works and how you would even go about charging, what kind of fees. What kind of figures do you come up with? How do you come up with those?

Amy Collins: Well, I do that a lot with my clients, because I have access to reports that show me what the major publishers are charging for their eBooks and I know it's about a one to six, one to seven ratio for the best selling books. Let's say "Gone Girl" as an eBook. They will license one copy of "Gone Girl" to a library for approximately $40. Unless you're a "Gone Girl" author, you're not going to get that, so maybe yours should be $20, or $29. The way you would set it up is you do it through your wholesaler. If you are Smashwords author, you will not have this option. Smashwords does not offer a licensing option, so if you've started with Smashwords and you want to move to a licensing option, you need to develop your own relationship with a wholesaler. Overdrive is the largest one. It's the grand daddy, and if you apply and get into Overdrive, you give them ... You do it right online. You give them the parameters of what your licensing terms should be.

Will it be for 6 months? Is it for 26 downloads? How much do you want per license? You can easily find these numbers simply by Googling them, or contacting me and I'll give you some advice, but if you've written a "how to" prescriptive business book for leaders, management leaders, and you're in demand, and you've got a great deal of demand and checkouts in the library market, you're probably looking at about $30-$35 for a 6 month license, in my opinion.
Susan Friedmann: That's renewable as you said. After that six month period is up, then you go back and you ask them to renew it. Correct?

Amy Collins: Yes, and after two or three renewals, they usually set it to renew automatically. What's nice is, yes, there's a little bit of work in the beginning, but eventually it becomes automatic, and when new libraries license your book, they get the option of saying, "Just automatically renew provided that my checkouts were high enough." It's all automated, it's lovely.

Susan Friedmann: What are some of the mistakes that you find authors are making in this environment?

Amy Collins: They're approaching librarians before they do their homework. This can be seen in, I'll give you a couple of examples. This can be seen in a number of different areas. They don't understand the library market well enough. They think they do, but because they've been in a library in the last year, they think they understand, but they don't understand that a particular library system that they're approaching only gets their money once a year. They get a big chunk of money in June, and here it is, October 11th, and they're approaching this librarian and they're asking her to buy their book. Well, their budgets are blown. They spent all their money for the year. They're not in the market for new materials at the moment. It's October, their money was given to them five months ago, they had spent three or four months prepping, knowing exactly how they were going to spend it, so know who you're approaching and know what their budgets look like. Every library system is different.

I wish I could tell you that it was as simple as just looking it up online, in some cases it is. Everyone's, I mean, public libraries are the public's business. You can find out their budget reports simply by Googling them, but if you're going to go after Houston, LA, Chicago, Miami, New York, the big guys, start by Googling and finding out when their budgets come due. That's one of the mistakes that I see. People who pitch at the wrong time, who don't understand how it works. The second thing, the mistakes that I see is they don't understand what the librarian needs. A librarian needs a book returnable, at a wholesaler, at a deep enough discount that they can stay within their own budgets. If you're making your book at a short discount, meaning not a full trade discount, non-returnable, the librarians not going to be ... They have needs.

They have needs and desires. They have bosses that they need to answer to and they need to stay within budget. They can't buy books non-
returnable no matter how impressive you think you are. The last week, one of the biggest mistakes I see is to not take into account librarians time, and this comes up in a myriad of ways. They'll call a librarian at 12:10 in the afternoon. Libraries are busy on lunch hours. They're busy at 5:30, they're very busy at 10 in the morning, so please honor the librarians time. If you have to call, if you can't do it over the email, then call them at 2 in the afternoon.

If you're going to send them a book, make sure that it has the ISBN, and the catalog and publication block and the Dewey Decimal code, and everything properly formatted on the copyright page. Why would a librarian choose your book if they have to look everything up and spend 20 minutes loading your book into their system, as opposed to all of the books like yours that they don't have to do that? They're going to choose somebody else's book. My answer to round up is they don't respect the librarians time, they don't understand how the budget system works, and that they don't pay attention to how the business is formatted. Do your research, and you'll have a far, far higher success rate.

Susan Friedmann: Something you mentioned just a moment ago was non-returnable. Can you talk more about that?

Amy Collins: Bookstores and libraries, starting in the '60s, got very, very nervous when this new sort of book came out. It was 1964, I believe, Penguin came out with this weird book, it was called a "paperback," and instead of being a real book, it was this cheap, cardboardy, flexible paperback and the entire industry rose up as one and said, "Nobody will buy these. This is going to ruin the publishing industry. You're destroying bookstores. We don't want any part of it." The publishers said, "Calm down. We'll make a deal with you. You try these for a year or two, and if they don't sell, we'll take them back. It's risk free." "Okay." Well, that was 1964. Many years have gone by and I am afraid that paperbacks are everywhere, but the returnability function is here to stay. It has become the publishing standard and the book industry standard that when you sell a book, if it does not sell or if it is not successful on a librarian shelf, or sell on a booksellers shelf, that they can return the book for a full refund for everything they paid for that book.

Susan Friedmann: I know that on my statements that I get from my publisher that there is that return line on the royalty statements. It's like, "Ah, I don't like to see that," but books do get returned, and I've had them returned to me personally, and unfortunately, they're not necessarily in the best condition that they get returned in, so that's ...

Amy Collins: That is true, but I will tell you that industry average for bookstores, the
return rate is as high as 40%, but in libraries? Across the industry, this is straight from the Book Industry Study Group, the return rate from the library market is 3%. They may buy returnable, but they don't return them very often.

Susan Friedmann: What else should we know about this environment?

Amy Collins: The librarians want to be a part of their community, and they want to be helpful to their patrons and to their community, and if you find yourself stymie for sales in the retail marketplace, if you can't break into your local Staples, if Costco won't even give you the time of day, if your local bookstore is snickering at you, you quite often can get a nice inroad into a local library, simply by offering to be of service. Can you write an article for their newsletter or their website? Can you offer a workshop that their patrons might be interested in, that if you find yourself hung up and stymied and stumped for sales, there's a lot that goes in libraries that expand out exponentially, that could turn into Amazon sales, that could turn into bookstore sales, I would strongly recommend that if you wanted to co-op the librarians desire to be helpful to the community, in a way, even if you want to do it long distance. Do a Skype event.

You will find yourself, at the end of the day, and I tell my clients 10 minutes a day, that's all you need to do. Send a couple of emails a day, 10 minutes a day. 10 minutes a day for a couple months, your sales may eventually start snowballing virally, so that you can actually take your foot off the gas in a way that doesn't happen in bookstores.

Susan Friedmann: One of my authors has written a beautiful children's book and she's really struggling to get it into the library. What would you suggest?

Amy Collins: Well, I'd have her look at a few things. Is it priced properly? Or, is it more expensive than the other books in her genre? If she says, "Well, yes, it's more expensive, but it's a better book," that's not a good answer. If Random House, which is one of the best publishers, is going to offer a book at $14, I don't care how good your book is. They're going to pick the book that fits their budget. The next thing I would ask her to take a look at is word count. For children's books in particular, there are very firm rules about how many words per page, depending on the age group and if you break those rules, librarians, more than anyone, will deny a book, because they know what a lot of people, especially children's book authors who haven't done the research, what a lot of people ignore is that librarians, teachers, and parents don't want to be reading for 45 minutes every night.

If they're going to have a popular book, it's going to be a book that allows
the parent to read to their child or read with their child, but not make the time investment of an hour or more. If the book is too long or too wordy, if the teacher has to hold it up, or the librarian has to hold it up in front of the group and every page takes five minutes to get through, another thing to look at. Is the copyright page properly formatted and are all of the T's crossed and the I's dotted? Without seeing the book, I can't really tell you, but she should definitely be taking a look to make sure that you obeyed all of the rules that the librarians needs, and if she doesn't know what they are, librarians are more than willing to help.

She should go and ask them. They're lovely people. As long as you don't show up at 12:10 and expect their time, but you show up at 2:10 in the afternoon, when they get a little bit of breathing time, they're usually very, very happy to offer you their experience and their strength.

Susan Friedmann: That's what they're all about, is helping people, so I would expect them to want to help you, so yes. How about offering to do a reading? You talked about maybe doing a course. How about doing a reading of your book in a library? Is that acceptable?

Amy Collins: Of course. Story times are one of the best ways, both for libraries and for bookstores. I tell my children's books authors that story time is the best, easiest way to get into a local library, but here's the question. If she lives in Santa Fe, once she's exhausted the Santa Fe market, how she's going to do that in Chicago? What some of my clients do that I absolutely love is they put kids together where they'll ... Because you can find these online for free. They'll generate word searches online, or you can take your page and strip the color out using just a basic app on your phone or on your iPad. Strip the color out and creating coloring pages, print 30 or 40 of them out and send a kit to a library in another city, and tell them, "It's a kit for story time," so that they choose to read your book for you.

Even though you're not even there, you send some stickers, a couple balloons, and a few coloring pages, kids love that. The librarians love that you've given them the materials that they don't have to think about, so contacting a library and giving them a story time kit is a wonderful way to get your children's book outside of your own market, and you don't even have to do the reading.

Susan Friedmann: How do you see that working for, let's say non-fiction author?

Amy Collins: For non-fiction authors, it's a little different, because there is no story time for that. If you're going to do an event across the country, Skype is usually the way to go. A lot of these libraries, there's a couple in San Diego that I've
done events for, even though I'm in New York, and they have conference rooms set up, and 2 o'clock on a Saturday afternoon, 30 people file in to their local library in San Diego, and there it is, my big, ugly mug, bigger than life on the screen, and I can see them and they can see me and we have a great time.

Susan Friedmann: How does that help to sell the books?

Amy Collins: If people like you, and if they like your content, they will check your book out at the library level, and they will read it, and they will recommend it to other people. Word of mouth is still the ... Remember how I said everything changes, the only constant is change? I'm going to tell you now the one thing since 1991 when I got into this industry, the one thing that has not changed is the number one way people hear about and decide to try a new book is recommendations. It's all about recommendations and word of mouth. Either a blogger that I like recommends the book, or my mother is talking about the book, or I'm standing in line reading people magazine, hoping no one notices and somebody starts up a conversation and talks about a book that Ryan Reynolds is ... It's all about recommendations, and nobody is more active in recommending books than librarians, and nobody is more passionate about books than library patrons.

It turns into sales. According to the Book Industry Study Group, in 2013, so these facts are a couple years old but the numbers are the same. In 2013 they did a study and they found out that the number of books that were sold into the library market could be directly connected. One book in the library equals five books sold online. That was Amazon plus Barnes & Noble, and Books-A ... In all the online, but it was a one to five ratio, and that as the library market was infused with more copies of that particular book, the online sales went up exponentially, and went up and it stayed at a five to one ratio.

Susan Friedmann: What's the best way for our listeners to contact you and find out more?

Amy Collins: Couple of things you can do. You can email me, Amy, a-m-y, @newshelves.com. Tell me how annoying I was and how much you disagree with me, I love it. You can go to my website, www.NewShelves.com. I have a blog and several, a lot, of free advice that I offer. There's a lot of things in my shopping cart that are completely free to download, templates and bits of advice. You know what they say about free advice, but I tend to like the sound of my own voice so I put a lot of content out there. If you like what you see, you're more than welcome to email me or drop us a call. My contact information's on my website.
Susan Friedmann: Then, as you know, we like to end up with leaving our listeners with a golden nugget. What would that be?

Amy Collins: I suppose my golden nugget today, and again, everything changes, is to ask yourself the following question. Do I really understand the library market and am I sure? My golden nugget for you is to spend time in the library, talk to librarians, educate yourself, talk to people like myself, but do not launch into this market without learning how the market works. You can not guess at this. There are rules and there are things that will allow you to be very successfully very easily, and there are mistakes that you can make that can really torpedo you, so learn your market.

Susan Friedmann: Excellent.

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And here's wishing you much book marketing success.